

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1967</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 8	"Body Of Christ"	I Corinthians 12:27
January 15	"The Meaning In The Mystery"	II Cor.11: 25
January 22	"God's Athlete"	I Cor. 9:24-27
January 29	"Salt Of The Earth"	Matthew 5:13
February 1	"The Pastor As Pastor"	
February 5	"Light Of The World"	Matthew 5:14
February 12	"Sinner's Profile: Chief Tempter"	Matthew 4:1-11
February 19	"Sinner's Profile: Who Discourage"	
February 23	"Cancer Of The Heart" Faith	
February 26	"Sinner's Profile: Who Stand Against God"	Luke 11:23
March 5	"Sinner's Profile: Who Speak Disparagingly"	John 6:9
March 12	"Sinner's Profile: Who Throw Stones"	
March 19	"Sinner's Profile: Who Shout Hosannas"	Matthew 21:9
March 26	"The Wrong Way To Belief"	John 20:14
April 2	"Servant"	Matthew 20:14
April 9	"New Creation"	II Cor. 5:17
April 16	"Aliens And Exiles"	I Peter 2:11
April 30	"Heirs"	Romans 8:16-17
May 7	"Perfect People"	Matthew 5:48
May 14	"The Israel Of God"	Galatians 6:16
May 14	"Letter Of Recommendation"	

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SERMON TITLE

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May 28	"The Meaning Of Infant Baptism"	Acts 2:38-39
June 4	"Stewards"	I Peter 4:10
June 11	"Good Soldiers"	II Timothy 2:3
June 18	"Imitators"	I Thess. 1:6-7
June 25	"The Approved"	Romans 16:10
July 2	"Without A Word"	I Peter 3:1
July 9	"To Have A Miracle"	Mark 8:5
July 16	"More Than One Way To A Man's Heart"	John 1:47
August 13	"On Facing Impossible Situations"	Jeremiah 42:13-14
August 20	"A Man For Others"	Luke 10:23-37
August 27	"God In Slow Motion"	Luke 17
September 3	"The Sons Of God"	John 3:2
September 10	"God's Autobiography"	II Tim 3:15-16
September 17	"God's Twin Gifts"	II Corinthians 3:6
September 24	"The Eye Of Faith"	John 1:18
October 1	Communion Meditation	
October 8	"God's Picture Book"	John 10:30
October 15	"By The Rain From Heaven"	Deuteronomy 11:11
October 29	"Man-With-The-Book"	
November 5	"The Church: God's People"	I Peter 2:9-10
November 12	Pertinent Remarks - "Project Now"	
November 19	"The Church: Fellowship In Faith"	Acts 4:32

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SERMON TITLE

TEXT

November 26	"The Church: Body Of Christ"	Romans 7:4
December 3	"Four Words Of Advent: Forgiveness"	Jeremiah 31:34
December 10	"Four Words Of Advent: Fear"	Malachi 4:2
December 17	"Four Words Of Advent: Comfort"	Isaiah 40:1
December 24	"Four Words Of Advent: Behold"	Isaiah 40:10
December 24	Christmas Eve Sermon	
December 31	"No Other Gods" (Sermon I: The Ten Commandments)	Exodus 20:3

"BODY OF CHRIST"

We resume today the series of sermons being preached for the most part in this year 1966-1967 on the general subject of the names given the early Christians. Today it is the name "Body of Christ;" and the text, from the Epistle for the Day -- or if you wish, from the 27th verse of the 12th chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians:

"You are the body of Christ, and individually
members one of another - "

Most preachers are characterized by the fact that they have certain basic themes that they keep hitting again and again in sermon after sermon. Be patient, then, with the preacher that you know, who have a certain way of going back and repeating certain basic themes. It's really a salutary thing, for in the final analysis there is only one basic theme, and that's the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. And within this, there are a limited number of things to be said.....such as God's truth, God's love, God's grace, God's redeeming power....and the challenge that God makes upon your soul and mine as we respond to what He offers. Now, any preacher, called by God, can be expected in sermon after sermon to talk about these things. These are basic. These are the fundamentals.

Now when you read your New Testament, you come upon perhaps the greatest preacher of all times, surely the greatest evangelist -- the Apostle Paul. And in one writing after another he has a basic theme that he keeps hitting. It comes up here and it comes up there in all of his writings. He talks about the Church of Jesus Christ. It was exceedingly precious to him. And he had a name

for the Church. He kept referring to it as the "body of Christ" -- so much so that the wording is practically the same for this text, whether you take it from the Epistle for the Day, or whether you take it from the letter that he wrote to the Corinthians....."body of Christ"...."body of Christ"..."body of Christ"

It doesn't seem to ring a bell with you, does it? When did you last refer to yourself as a member of the body of Christ, as an individual part of the body of Christ? And when this series of sermons began last Fall, surely you paid more than ordinary attention, didn't you, when you heard the sermon title announced as "Believer"....."Friend"....."Witness" -- even a sermon preached upon the title "Fools" commanded your attention. But who is going to stand alert when the preacher says, "I want to talk to you now, using a reference aptly given to Christians -- Body of Christ."

It is a unique name. Now any name uniquely given invariably arises out of a unique situation, or a unique experience. And if you could press the Apostle Paul and say, "Why do you keep using this term, 'body of Christ' -- tell us, what is its origin? -- why do you feel that this is the only way that you can best express what you believe the Church to be? -- and what you consider an individual, in his relationship to other Christians, when you refer to him as individually a part of the body of Christ?"

....well it could be that the Apostle Paul would say to you:

"You want an answer to that question? Listen carefully, I'll give you an answer to that question. It all began like this: I was an enemy of the Christian cause. Mention the name 'Christian' and there was a red flag waved in front of me. I despised them, I looked upon them as the riff-raff of Israel....

...in fact, I had orders to take them wherever I could find them and bring them back bound, and make them stand trial - - "

....in fact there are those who tell us that if you really wanted to know the record, you could even find Saul standing around when Christians were being killed, and who knows but what -- being happy in the thought.

Well this man Paul says, "One day when I was making a particular journey, bent on the specific purpose, trying to ferret out these despicable Christians, something happened to me. I was stopped in my path....I was blinded....and I heard a voice, a voice from Heaven that said, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou them?' - - -

ah, no! - - that isn't what I heard. The voice from Heaven said,

'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'

"After this experience," Paul said, "God's plan was for me to go to the house of Ananias in Damascus, and there in that enforced idleness I had many days in which to do a great deal of thinking - - "

....and it isn't too much to say that Paul says that "Those words kept ringing in my ears....'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' - - - the truth of the matter is, I was out to get those people. But the voice said 'Why do you do this to me?'"

"Now," says Paul, "this is what I believe the Church to be - - I believe the Church to be the body of Christ." Paul never had done with that figure of speech. He kept referring to it again and again and again.

Now move in closely on it - - don't be afraid now. Get ready for a surprise.....if you press this figure of speech far enough, you might come out in

this way - - - that the Church is Jesus Christ!

- - and Jesus Christ is the Church!

....there's that figure of speech - - you are the body of Christ!

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Would this help you any....you and I are standing at the corner of Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue. We're engaged in conversation, then somebody goes down past us -- I'm quite sure I know the person -- I think I've seen the person, yet the name escapes me...but I'm confident that you know who the person is. So I say to you, "Who is that?" And you turn immediately in the direction of my voice and the direction in which I seem to be pointing, and your eyes fall upon a particular body (I suppose it's a rude way to put it, but your eyes fall on so much flesh and blood)....and as you see this body, you say, "Why that's so-and-so". Now So-and-So is never a disembodied spirit. Jesus Christ, in the figure that Paul loved to use, is not so much as a disembodied spirit. In language that was meant to be helpful to us - - "You are the body of Christ" - - this is what he says the Church is.

Now brace yourself.....dare we honestly say this of ourselves? It's a far more precious figure of speech than the one that we have been using in recent years, Family of God....Family of God. It's really far more apt - - "body of Christ" - - this is what he says the Church is -- that the Church is to the world as Jesus Christ is to the world -- that as God came to us in Christ, so Christ comes to us now, in and through the Church -- Christ comes as the Church!

The Apostle Paul could say that undoubtedly because of what had happened to him. He honestly believed that no one became part of the Body of Christ

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who had not had an encounter with Jesus Christ. He had had his encounter and he believed fervently that anyone who was part of the Body of Christ was a person who had had a similar encounter. You know, that's the way we seem to strike it always here in this congregation. We talk about one's relationship with this congregation as an expression of his commitment to Jesus Christ. And tomorrow night when the New Members Group will meet, this is one of the first things that will be said to them, as some of you who have joined in recent years may recall -- "We are not here to-night to talk about adding another name to the roster of this congregation. But we are here primarily to talk about your basic commitment to Jesus Christ, and your relationship to Saint Luke Church becomes an expression of it." We can't say it often enough.

Now because this had happened to the Apostle Paul, he believed that this was the thing that should happen to everybody who took the name of Jesus Christ and became part of the Christian Church. To that end, then, he became an expression of Jesus Christ. Can you honestly think of yourself as being to the world Jesus Christ? "You are the body of Christ" says the Apostle Paul.

Let me say to you at this time that I'm inclined to think that if the Apostle Paul had been a married man, there would have been nights when he would have been greeted in the morning by his wife who would have said to him, as she got awake, "Whatever ailed you last night? You sure tossed sleeplessly back and forth in bed, and I thought I heard you get up. What, now, is troubling you?" And I think it's reasonable to believe that he might have answered in this manner: "What's troubling me? You know the reports that have come back to me from Rome, from Ephesus, from Corinth -- I can hardly believe it! There

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are groups of people banded together who take the name of Christ, and the reports that have come back to me constitute the fact that there's division, and dissension.....why even in Corinth, of all places, there are people in the name of Christ (no, I wish I could say it) -- but there are people who get together as little groups....the outcome is, whether they realize it or not, they give their loyalty to a particular leader at the expense of another leader of Christ. They say they're of Cephas, they say they're of Apollos..... some even say they're of me. The net result of this kind of talk means division. You can't divide the body. You can't take it apart. It was meant to function as a whole."

....then he might say to his wife, "Life-of-my-life, heart-of-my-heart, do you understand now why I grieve? -- because when people allow this kind of thing to happen, they are injuring the Body of Christ! They're doing this to Jesus Christ!"

Have you had a sore thumb lately? Have you had a pinched nerve in your shoulder lately? Have you pulled a muscle? If you've had a headache for five minutes, you know how all of you feels miserable. Nothing can happen to a part but what the whole is not affected. When Paul talked about the body of Christ, this also was part of the picture and he spells it out in some of his writings. What a precious figure of speech, to think that you and I, by the grace of God, should have this privilege of being to the world as His mind and as His spirit -- to think that we could be to the world as the channels of God's love! -- as the channels of God's truth! It is a precious thing. It must be cherished, and guarded.

We've lost something in our day when we don't teach our children some of

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the fables that another generation used to teach to their children. A great deal of virtue is exemplified in some of those fables, one moral after another taught well. I'm reminded of what the Roman historian Libbey recited as the fable that was taught by one of the rulers of a particular state when he discovered that within the corporate body there was dissension. This is the way the fable goes -- it's worth remembering --- it can be applied to any corporate group:

....he said one day the members of a body got together. And they began to complain about the stomach. They said the stomach was doing nothing but consuming all the food that was brought to it. And then as they nursed one another's feelings, complaining about the stomach, the hand said, well, in spite, this is what we'll do -- we'll bring no food to the mouth....and the mouth said, if any food should be brought to me, I'll refuse to open my mouthand the teeth said, I refuse to chew any food that's brought.....and the throat said, I refuse to swallow any food that is brought.....

....you know how the story ends -- eventual starvation. When any single part fails to fulfill the purpose for which it was intended, the whole will suffer.

Said the Apostle Paul -- "you are the Body of Christ". Can you think of anything more wonderful than this? Dare we believe it? Dare we strive to allow it to become a reality?

Can the world on the outside look upon us, and then say, you are Christ's lips....you are Christ's hands....you are Christ's heart. If they can't say it of us, then maybe it won't be said of anybody.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

January 15, 1967

"THE MEANING IN THE MYSTERY"

The sermon on this day bears the title, "The Meaning in the Mystery;" and the text, I Corinthians, 11th chapter, a portion of the 25th verse:

"This do in remembrance of me - -"

It is not too much to say that none of us ever fully understands the meaning, the message and the method of God. This is never to say that God does not give us sufficient information. It is given to every man the knowledge of salvation. Each of us knows how Christ sacrificed Himself, that our sins should be taken away, we should be given the hope of Heaven, the gift of Eternal Life.

It is not too much to say, however, that when we come into the very Presence of God the element of mystery remains. God is God....we are finite. This is a prefatory remark as I stand before you now, fully aware that we are gathered here to come to the Table of the Lord.

We are a gathered people. And as I stand before you now I make bold to suggest that a variety of characterizations become us. There will be variety in your temperament, there will be variety in your disposition, as you approach the altar.

I have walked long enough with some of you, and you've trusted me enough to lay bare your souls, that I know full well that when some of you come to the altar today, either to stand or to kneel to receive the Sacrament, that you will be coming with a contrite heart. The only word that will be seemed to be formed at all from your lips will be words such as these...."I am a

sinner, O God -- have mercy! -- have mercy! -- have mercy!"

....this is what will be the characterization for some of you as you come today to receive the Sacrament.

Some of you as you come to receive the Sacrament will come overwhelmed by a great joy, you are fully aware that Jesus Christ is your Saviour -- there is no doubt in your mind -- and the awareness of this floods your soul with peace and as you approach the altar, even though it is for the intention that your every sin should be forgiven, you may even come with a spring in your step, because you know that you are being numbered in the ranks of the redeemed.

Some of you may come approaching the altar -- casually! -- not fully appreciating what's about to happen, and not having given due and necessary thought, so human are we.

One may also admit that there will be some of us coming to the altar to receive the Sacrament who will be surrounded by a flood of memories, good and precious memories, as we recall when we first received the Sacrament, as we may recall with respect and appreciation the pastor who confirmed us and made known to us, in a very special and wonderful way, God's redeeming grace.

Some of us will feel the gentle pressure upon our shoulders of the hand of those who first led us to Sunday School, who opened in front of us the Scriptures and taught us to love the Good Book.

Some of us may come with a heavy heart to receive the Sacrament, because even as they are ushered into the very Presence of Christ, they will be made aware of an element of loneliness as they think of those with whom they walked on this fair earth, and now live in the prospect of being re-united

with them in Heaven above.

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So great is the variety that may characterize us as we come to the altar. You may not come as somebody else comes, you may not come as the person alongside of you comes, you may not come even as another member of your family may come. But there is one thing that characterizes every single one of us, despite this variety of characterizations, there is one thing that can be said of each of us.

Should God's angel stand at this step, and then stop you as you approach the altar, and put to you this question:

" -- do you fully understand what's about to happen?

" -- do you fully understand how Christ comes to us

in these elements?

" -- do you fully understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper? - "
...who among us will be able to answer, without hesitation, without reservation -- "I understand perfectly!"

The element of mystery remains. We appreciate only to a degree.

But is it not so that there's enough about it that we can understand, there's enough about it that ought to hold us in good stead -- what could these things be?

I suggest that we go back to the mind and the spirit of Jesus Christ. When He instituted the Sacrament, He said, "This do." It's mandatory. You can't be more precise than that, can you? Can you be more specific than what these two words imply? To His disciple band He said "This do." He does not say, "I give you an option." I'm not so sure that God deals in options. I'm not so sure that it becomes God to give us a variety of alternatives where

the welfare of the soul is at stake. Specifically, precisely, He says, "This do."

He doesn't say, "If you're inclined to think that this would appeal to you".....He doesn't even say that "If this should be reasonable - - " He simply said, "Do it."

Now since it's that important to God, what are we to understand by it and through it? May I suggest that in the first place we do appreciate the fact that in the Sacrament Jesus Christ comes to us. He said, "Take, this is my body - - - this is my blood." Couldn't He just as well have said - - "This is I -- here -- I'm coming to you -- here in the Sacrament I offer you Myself"? You can understand that, can't you? Words spoken by Christ....we must begin with this in the understanding of the Sacrament.

And then we do well to understand that He gave this Sacrament to His disciples as a farewell. Very shortly after the Sacrament was celebrated they were to be scattered like sheep without a shepherd. I say it very quickly and advisedly - - they were to be almost on their own, and they would need something to fortify them, so He gave them Himself.

That word fortify is a perfectly good word, The church has a way of using it, that the Sacrament has been instituted for the comforting of thy soul....for the comforting of thy soul. You who remember your Latin, it comes from the word which means to strengthen, to fortify. In fact it's more a military term than an emotional expression, to fortify. In and through the Sacrament we are made strong to face the evil in the world which surrounds us.

Weren't you caught up short a bit when you heard the reading of the Epistle for the day? - - when the Apostle Paul is laying it on the line as to

what becomes Christian behaviour....

.....be kind and gracious to those who persecute you

.....to outdo one another in showing honor

.....to live in harmony one with another

.....to show brotherly affection

....this is no easy thing!

....to be kind, to be gracious, to those who doubt you...to those who abuse you...to those who speak ill of you. To face a world characterized by evil, Jesus Christ in this parting gesture says, "Here -- I give you myself. Remember me."

We need people that we can remember, who at the remembrance of them make us strong, give nerve and fiber to our muscle. There was a boy who grew up in the slums of London, and then there was a man named Quenton Hoag who rescued him and brought him into the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The man took on new life, and every now and then he was tempted to revert to his past....and he confided to a friend, "And whenever that moment comes, I reach in my wallet and I take out this picture of old 'Q.H.' (old Quenton Hoag)...and when I look at him I remember his example, his faith, his trust in me, and it holds me in good stead." So in the Sacrament we remember Him, His example.

In the Sacrament we remember what He gives us presently, and we go out to face the world fortified. In the days when men went off to do battle, in the Middle Ages, they celebrated the Sacrament sometimes on the field. They tell us that they received the Sacrament with one foot in the stirrup -- taking from the priest the Sacrament, yet being made ready immediately, without a moment's hesitation, to go out and do battle. You can understand this, can't

you? Whatever else you can't understand, you ought to be able to understand that we're surrounded by evil, and the Christian cannot face evil except as he's fortified by Jesus Christ.

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You can understand this, can't you - - that when He offered the Sacrament, He never offered it to a single person. He didn't say, "John, come here, I want to give you something." - - even though John was known as the beloved disciple. He invited the disciples as a group, and even within the disciple group there was a man named Judas.....He did not even so much as withhold the Sacrament from him, so great is the responsibility upon us, when we're ushered into God's nearer presence.

You can understand this, can't you, that the Sacrament is always corporately expressed. It's not only food for my soul, but it's also the sharing of a fellowship, it's something that we receive together. There can be no such thing as an isolated Christian. There is no such thing as a solitary disciple. You and I are strengthened and fortified through the fellowship of the redeemed.

I thank God for certain shoulders that I've brushed along the highway to Heaven, who have brought God's peace and strength to me. Someone I know sent out Christmas greetings this year, occasionally to a highly selected few he wrote in his own hand...."Someone like you makes it easier for me to believe that God has come." We are strengthened through the fellowship as we approach the altar.

But when we approach the altar as a fellowship, this fellowship must be characterized by peace and harmony. In the old Scottish Church man was admonished that he had no right to come to receive the Sacrament unless he lived with charity among the brethren. You can understand that, can't you? God can-

not dwell in the heart that's filled with hatred. If you hate your brother, then the Biblical admonition is that you go and you make peace with him before you come to take your place in the fellowship in the shadow of an altar.

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We have many blessings that come to us in many ways. Perhaps you may consider it an added blessing now to receive the Sacrament at an altar which has a visual reminder of the first celebration of the Sacrament, the insert panel is a reproduction in wood of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper. It want to tell you a little bit about Leonardo da Vinci's painting of that Last Supper originally. We are told on good authority that Leonardo da Vinci when he was painting the figures, found himself hating a certain man, and he had his moments of vengeance and he even seized upon that emotional state of his soul to paint the figure of Judas Iscariot -- so much was his heart filled with hatred and bitterness.

And his painting was not completed. There was yet the figure of the Master to be painted. And we're told that Leonardo da Vinci could not find it within him to paint the figure of Jesus Christ, His grace and beaut, and the love that becomes the face of Jesus Christ. It was only after he went and made peace with the brother that he hated that he came back and completed what remains as an unforgettable masterpiece of the world.

And with these remarks I make no further comment in this sermon.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD'S ATHLETE"

We continue today the series of sermons based upon the general theme of names or titles given to the early Christians. It's a natural for today, it's the Epistle that suggests our consideration. It's "God's Athlete." And the text, it's from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the 9th chapter, the 24th to the 27th verses.....to serve our purpose immediately, these words:

"Don't you know that they who run in a race
run all, but only one receives the prize.
So run, that you may obtain it."

Some people communicate easily. It makes the difference in this teacher as over against that teacher. The subject matter is the same, but this teacher, perhaps, being gifted in this direction, or working at it - - devises this method or that method by which she can be sure that the material gets across.

It's one of the outstanding characteristics of the foreman or the superintendent in the shop, and there's a particular way by which things ought to be done. It's one thing to give the man the manual....it's another thing, perhaps, through your own personality, through your own understanding of the man involved, to be able to take him aside and to make crystal clear to him what it is that has to be done and the manner in which it can be best done.

It's a highly desirable trait for a preacher to be able to communicate easily and well. No matter how fine his education, no matter how well he may be versed in the Scriptures, no matter how well he knows his theology, if, however, when he goes to the sacred desk and stands up to preach, he just can't get these timeless truths into the minds and hearts of his people, he

can be less than effective.

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This was one of the great characteristics of the Apostle Paul, perhaps the greatest evangelist of all times. He had a way of dealing with the timeless truths, and then clothing them in language that his hearers might understand, whether he was standing up to preach, whether he was writing them a letter. He would look for this figure of speech, he'd look for that figure of speech -- he'd try to take these wonderful truths, and then clothe them in symbols, or perhaps use a metaphor with which they were familiar, until he got across what they needed to know.

Can't you see him now, that itinerant tent mender, who did more than keep his mind on his stitching. For you see, he had that constant obsession that there was the full claim of God upon his heart, and that come wind or weather, he was to be faithful to his high calling. This constant obsession characterized all of his thinking, all of his thinking on anything and everything that he observed.

As an example.....the race-winner. He might have been there in one of those villages in Asia Minor, mending his tent....and this is what he was thinking about. Now see if we can get the situation in clear and proper focus.Corinth as an example. It was one of the communities of Christians that caused him no end of grief. He was always getting reports back from Corinth. So little of the reports brought him comfort. He was annoyed and irritated by their divisions and their strife....he was annoyed, of course, that they so easily forsook the Gospel of Jesus Christ and began to live as pagans....

....small wonder....you know the kind of city Corinth was, don't you?

It was a filthy city. It was as corrupt as any place in Asia Minor.

Name any sin -- Corinth had it, or perchance (can I put it for you this way?) -- name it, and if Corinth didn't have it -- she'd invent it!

....that's the kind of a city Corinth was.

This is an evidence of her degradation...there on the Acropolis, the hill overlooking the Isthmus, was the Temple to Aphrodite, goddess of love, surrounded by priests and priestesses. We have it on good authority that she had a thousand priestesses who served at the altar of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. And then these thousand priestesses became sacred prostitutes, left the temple area, came down into Corinth at night and plied their trade.

....it took a bit of doing to remain faithful to Jesus Christ in a city like Corinth!

This was in the background of this itinerant tent-mender's mind as he, too, plied his trade, mending tents, but always pre-occupied by this obsession: faithfulness to Jesus Christ, unqualified commitment.

Then it might have been that as he wrote about this he remembered that there in that village where he happened to be working at that particular time, there was much talk about the Isthmaean Games, how they were all excited -- maybe within a week or so someone from their village would come home with a victor's wreath, and how they'd erect a statue commemorating the fact that it was their village that had the winner that year.

And as he reflected on that he thought of what it took to make a winner. And then it was that he perhaps pricked his thumb, as he was using that long needle mending his tent, and he said, "That's it! -- that's the figure of speech I'll use! This is language they can understand. I'll talk to these Corinthians about the lesson from an athlete, because in a certain sense, we're God's athletes, that's what we are. Let's take a page from the book of discipline, the manual of training for the athlete."

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So he was able to communicate wisely and well. To this day we find his text unforgettable. Paul reminds us, therefore, that the runner achieved the moment of victory because, 1) he never lost sight of the goal; 2) because he kept in training. For the balance of this sermon period let us think of these two things.

He never lost sight of his goal.

Anyone who fervently desires to achieve as an athlete has an objective. He knows the team that he wants to make, and he knows what he wants to do as a member of that team. This kind of thing is always being pounded into him. That's why they have their breaks, you see, that the coach reminds them if perchance temporarily they've forgotten what they're about, and how to achieve it. No runner ever accidentally, casually, happens to cross the line. He has had that mark in mind from the very beginning. Every athlete has his goal. Says the Apostle Paul to them, and to us, "What's your goal? What's your objective?" You just don't go through life aimlessly.

Well, what is your objective as a Christian? Take the figure of speech -- you are God's athlete -- what's your objective?

To save time let me suggest the proper answer. The objective of God's athlete is to become Christlike. This is why Jesus chose disciples, that they might come after Him and be like Him. It has occurred to you, hasn't it, that this is the fundamental purpose of the Christian -- to mirror, to reflect, to be a good example of Jesus Christ? This is the point at which you begin! When our Lord was here on earth and He called disciples, His primary purpose was that they should be with Him, to follow after Him, to learn of Him, that they might become like Him.

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It's always a frightening thought that this same Paul, in one of his writings, has a reference to you and to me...when he talks about the followers of Jesus Christ he says, "Ye are Christ's"and you may write it either way. Some people are never quite sure what the original was, but either one has meaning. You can spell Christ's with a apostrophe-s, or you can make it mean the plural of Christ....

....a follower of Jesus Christ belongs to Christ -- he's possessed.

....we who are followers of Jesus Christ should be to the world

(dare we to use the figure of speech?) as little Christs.

That is your objective, isn't it? This is your goal? This is the thing that you're about, isn't it, in the Christian faith?

It's good Pauline theology to believe this. No one ever achieves who doesn't have a goal. This is one reason why this congregation emphasizes its youth ministry as much as it does, that in their impressionable years they might be dealing with the things that will help them to have the proper orientation and the good and worthy objective.

I speak as a pastor, I speak as one who is a parent. It's not easy to wait until those who are young finally discover what their real objective in life is. It's like a miracle in some people's lives when suddenly it seems to occur to them that this is their purpose, this is their justification for existence. This is what they were meant to be, this is what they were meant to do! It's a thrilling thing to discover when this moment of realization happens! And we can well afford to be patient, pouring into their lives, as graciously as possible, all of these influences which will help them to achieve that moment of awareness of objective, and of a goal.

A clever wit one time pictures for us two Martians, I suppose one has to put it this way -- looking down upon us. And these two Martians are engaged in conversation.

And one raises the question, "What do you see down there on Earth?"

And the reply comes, "I see a lot of people, I see a lot of people...

...I see a lot of people."

And the inquirer says, "And what are they doing?"

And the answer comes back, "They're going."

And the inquirer says, "What do you mean, 'they're going'? Where are they going?"

And the answer is, "They're just going -- nowhere in particular -- they're just going."

It's the tragic thing that's being said about us, perhaps. Our generation, they tell us, is characterized by its meaninglessness. You don't have to go to church to be told. Pick up a great deal of recent novels, attend some of your Broadway productions. Some of us cry out and say, they're horrible..... ..some of us say they're nauseating. But what if we had to admit they're simply throwing back to us life as it is! -- characterized by its meaninglessness. Said the Apostle Paul, who would have us look upon ourselves as God's athletes, "Have your goal in mind." For the Apostle Paul, the goal of goals was to become more Christlike.

May I suggest that each of us take the admonition seriously. I'm sorry we don't do it as once it was done. We used to go off, in the days of my youth as I remember it, to conferences, Hi-Y conference, a Luther League conference, a Sunday School conference.....and we had leaders in the Christian

faith who came to us, and would not parade in front of us their doubts, but they brought us the inspiration of their commitment to Jesus Christ. And every now and then, as I remember it, somebody would raise the question..."Ten years from now, where will you be, what will you be doing? - - and as over against that, will you be more Christlike than you are right now?"

Well, the Apostle Paul says an athlete has a goal.

Then he also says he keeps in training. He brings to this goal the necessary discipline by which the goal can be achieved. You never drift toward the victor's line. You prepare for it.

It's a strange thing that even in the world of athletics, they've taken some of the words that used to belong to us - - dare I say it that way?

....and an athlete is referred to as one who is dedicated

...one who never breaks training, who keeps at it faithfully. Maybe one of the unkindest of all things, and yet equally honest, is the fact that we Christians have never really known what it is to be in training. We go at it in spurts, we go at it spasmodically. Could it be that for some people this hour on a Sunday morning is the only evidence of any kind of discipline they allow themselves in the course of a week?

Was it Paderewski, now to move over into the field of arts, who said that if he did not practice one day, he knew it....if he did not discipline himself to go to the keyboard for a week, his friends and family knew it....and if three weeks should pass without his rehearsing, disciplining himself to set aside a particular portion of each day, he said within three weeks the whole world would know it.

For those people who lived in Corinth, it took a bit of doing to be faith-

ful and to keep themselves in training. The world was always pressing in on them. But Christians were meant to achieve, by the grace of God, the hope of Heaven.

Lest you forget it, we even write it into our liturgy, that as we become Christlike there is vouchsafed to us the blessed hope of Heaven. What do we say in our liturgy?

- - " . . . unto Eternal Life . . . "

It was Adoniram Judson, who was the great missionary who went to Burma. If I remember correctly, I saw the memorial tablet in his church in New England. It reads something like this - - " . . Malden was his birthplace "

.....and then it lists the fields of his endeavors, and ends by saying - -

" . . . Heaven was his destination . . . "

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen,
from the lectern,
following the sermon - January 22, 1967

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As a member of the Board of Deaconess Community work it's my good fortune on occasion to attend the Motherhouse in Philadelphia. And there, when the meal has been served, and as people are about to leave the table, it's then that they have their special prayer. We've come here to feast upon the Word of Heaven, the Bread of Life. We're about to leave. Let us bow our heads in prayer.....

O GOD, Thou hast spread a table for us.

Thy preached Word and the Word read from the sacred desk has been offered to us.

We have come to a place especially set aside in Your Name. These walls, hallowed as they are, carry Your Name.

We acknowledge these blessings, Thy House, Thy people and Thy Word.

As we turn our backs and go away from this place, help us to better understand what it is that's taken place here. It's been divine encounter. We believe that You have come to us. Help us to understand that Your continuing presence goes with us. Jesus Christ is the Eternal Pilgrim, the Continuing Companion.

Now as we go out into the world, may we remember our objective.

OUR FATHER.....

"SALT OF THE EARTH"

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It would be highly desirable to always give heed to the name or the title by which a person is known, for names and titles are important. If I've never met a certain person and I hear you refer to him, just by what you call him, there may come into clear focus for me the kind of person that I think he is from what you've said about him, just by the name you've used for him. Names and titles are important. That's why, this year, from last September until June, we're concerning ourselves during this pulpit period with the names and titles by which the early Christians were known.

There was a very wise school teacher who said, "I always try to put the best possible construction on any pupil that I have -- his attitude, his demeanor -- because if he knows this, then perchance I give him something to live up to." Maybe that's the reason why those astute souls, long before the world ever had such a word as psychology, the Hebrews as a good example, chose for their children very carefully the names by which they would be known. For the name was either to indicate something that had already happened, or the kind of person they expected and earnestly hoped their son or daughter would become. You remember, don't you, that's where you got the name David -- it means 'beloved of the Lord.' The name Karen, as an example, means 'pure'. And how fortunate anyone who could be known as Mary, with the intention that she would always reflect in her life, her spirit, her personality, something of the gracious characteristics of the woman who was chosen by God to become the mother of our Lord. Names...titles....are important. They may give some-

thing to a man to live up to.

The reverse of the coin is also important. Let me speak in a derogatory manner about a person, let me as a leader of youth, or as a father of two sons, down-grade, and I may establish for them a reputation to maintain...if that's what they are -- if that's what people think they are -- then why try to improve? Be careful, my friend, how you use names and titles.

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, he didn't hesitate to use names and titles. He had a whole catalog of them, and it seemed every time He turned around He had a different name for them. Today's sermon deals with the occasion when He turned to His disciples and said, "You're the salt of the earth."

Ask God now, for the moment, to give you a sanctified imagination -- don't ever be afraid to ask for something like that. Try to picture this thing, how it happened. Here was the carpenter's son, the itinerant preacher - prophet.... God in the flesh. He had been here now for some time, He had gathered the followers. They were willing to claim Him as Master....He was delighted to have them as disciples. They weren't perfect people. You know how they were tempted, you know how they disappointed Him.....every single one of them had feet made out of clay, that was always chipping away and deteriorating. And if they ever became aware of the haloes that they had, they were constantly being tilted or dropped altogether. Yet they had an encounter with Jesus Christ. They could never have done with Him, and they kept following after Him. And to these people who kept following after Him, He one day said to them, "You are the salt of the earth."

Now when He said that He said two things. He said something about the world; and He said something about them, His disciples. The full weight of the

sermon, now, deals with these two things: what He implies about the world, and His declaration to the disciples themselves.

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But before we deal with this, let me remind you what salt is. To the ancient world there were three things that were pure....the sun, the sea, and salt. Any single one of them was fully acquainted with the use of salt. Now salt, generally speaking, does three things - - it purifies, it preserves, and adds flavor.

Now about the world....He was ever the astute observer. As He went around from place to place and saw person-to-person, He must have been impressed with the fact that they were sad-eyed, sin-stained and were sour. As it is true today, it was so very true for them, that as far as society was concerned there were only the two pronounced strata....the very, very rich....and the very, very, very poor. Jesus spent most of His time with the peasant stock. Oh, occasionally He'd encounter one who was wealthy, but that was a limited kind of contact. But whatever His contacts were with either end of the spectrum, we have reason to believe as we understand what He said and what He did, that generally speaking people were sad-eyed, and they'd gone sour on life.

So few, if any of them, had a spring in their step, a light in their eyes and a song in their heart. The world needed something. It needed zest, it needed a purifying touch, it needed something to preserve that purifying touch.

And you and I survey the world of which we are a part. We, the most affluent of all the people on the face of the earth, with the highest standard of living, perhaps to be outdone only by the Swedes.....and then we bring ourselves up short by reminding ourselves that Sweden has the highest suicidal rate of any people. And we shudder to think of the reality of our own experi-

ence. There's something wrong with us when we can't enjoy life to the full, to believe that it has meaning and purpose and to be constantly motivated by that, and that no matter what the winds or pressures may be, to always keep our faces toward the sun.

Honestly now, He knew full well that this was the character of the world. He also knew that this was the world that God loves, and knowing that the world needed something.....

...can I give it to you now? He did not so much as prepare a blue-print for society....He did not so much as give Himself forever to making pronouncements -- important as the plan and the pronouncement may be....

....but He kept expending Himself in people, so that one day He could say to a particular group of people at a particular place - - "You are the salt of the earth - - you are what the world needs."

So well did He succeed, mark it well, good friend, it's a valid observation that was made after the world received its first real taste of Christianity. By the second century there were those who being qualified to make the observation who maintained, and I give you a quote, that "The world would come to destruction if the Christians were not present in it."

Now what is salt? It does the three things.

It purifies. The men and women in the day of Jesus Christ, they knew the Commandments. They were all, interestingly enough, God-fearing people. They never doubted the fact of God's existence. But for this reason or for that reason they had become impure, and their lives were stained. They needed a purifying touch. There are some people, sad to relate, who no matter where

they go, defile almost anything that they touch. On the other hand are those who like Goldsmith, of whom it was said no matter where he went he brought an adoring touch. Christians are meant to bring a purifying, a cleansing touch into society, into their own family circle...by the grace of God, into their own lives. Salt is a purifying agent.

Salt is a preservative, you know that. Would you allow this homespun item for the moment.....I have two younger brothers, one of whom married a farmer's daughter. She never lost her love for the farm. So after living in town for a while, two years ago they bought some acreage in the country. To show you now genuine her love for the farm remains, they had to have some livestock....a cow, some hogs. Last year they butchered for the first time. My brother Don told me sadly - - "The hams looked perfectly beautiful, but we lost them. I guess we just didn't put the salt in deep enough." Maybe that's the trouble with today's world. We who are meant to be the salt of the earth just aren't penetrating deep enough!

It's always a surprising thing to discover how on occasion we can be so ineffective....just the ordinary casual recognition of our Christian faith, and never allow ourselves time to become deeply involved - - to penetrate to the depth where the thing really becomes effective. Did it ever occur to you that our Lord Jesus Christ, while He touched many, many people, in His plan saw fit to limit a very close and vital relationship to twelve men, and how deeply they allowed Him to penetrate into their lives, and that the meaning of the Christian faith for each one of them was only according to their willingness to allow Him to penetrate? A little pinch might go a long way, but sometimes it needs more than a little sprinkling.

The third thing to be said about salt....it gives flavor.

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Now allow me to do this, will you. I've never quite forgotten it, and it is expressive. The little boy was asked to give his definition of salt, and with all the honesty of his heart he replied, "Salt is what makes potatoes taste bad when you don't put it on." The handful of Christians let loose in society can bring the zest and the flavor that life needs!..No matter how well it may be in order, no matter how beautifully planned. Here again, being quite autobiographical....during these days of Winifred's convalescence her circle graciously brings the evening meal to the Parsonage. One day last week when one of the women came, it looked perfectly beautiful. But being a good and able and honest cook, she simply added, "You may have to add a bit of salt to bring out the true flavor." Christians are meant to bring out the true flavor in life! -- that life can be beautiful, that life was meant to be enjoyed! -- that life has a purpose. This is what salt can do....

...purify.....preserve.....bring zest.

It's not an accidental thing that the more committed a man is to Jesus Christ the more zest there may be in his life. Why not! Heaven is his destination! And all that he does is motivated by the fact that he belongs to God and nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever cut asunder the bond of love between God and His child. If that isn't enough to give spring to any man's step, what, then, can do it?

So well did the early Christians succeed that there were those who said, "The world will come to destruction if it weren't for the Christians."

....heard anybody say that about us lately?

....heard anybody say it about you lately?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

February 1, 1967
Westminster, Maryland

Notations.....THE PASTOR AS PASTOR

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To begin with, one might say a pastor is as any Christian, only more so. This of course requires definition.

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Look at it this way. Any Christian should exemplify in his life the distinctive Christian virtue which is love. This in itself implies a shepherding responsibility.

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The Pastor as one among the flock is looked upon as a leader. Now a leader should have a little more than those who follow.

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A Pastor has the responsibility to lead --to lead in love. That's the second thing that needs to be said. First he sees himself as one who leads; secondly as one who loves. And in the third place, he must see himself as one who longs for those who do not follow. This third aspect of the Pastor's responsibility is often overlooked. For the responsibility of the Pastor remains for those who stray and get lost as well.

February 5, 1967

"LIGHT OF THE WORLD"

Today's sermon, another in the series dealing with the names, titles, given the early Christians:

"Ye are the light of the world"

...a designation quite akin to the one that we considered last Sunday, when our Blessed Lord said, "Ye are the salt of the earth."

What, now, will you make of a text like this, that I dare say immediately is rather unique, for when our Blessed Lord gives this designation to His disciples He's using the very same designation which He also gives to Himself. He who said "I am the light of the world" says also to His disciples, "You are the light of the world." What will you make of it? Dare we believe that we are to be to the world as Jesus Christ? Dare anybody make so bold as to equate himself with Jesus Christ? The words are the same:

"I am the light of the world"

- - "You are the light of the world."

Maybe this might help. My friend Myrl Colvin, an eminent pathologist, had a perfectly wonderful and beautiful marriage. God has given them, as he said, some forty years together. Then, stricken by cancer, she died a terrible death.

Not long after that one of his two daughters came and said, "We're going to move back to the old homestead, Father. I want to take Mother's place." And he said to her, "You shall take Mother's place in this regard, perhaps

even better!" And in all modesty she replied, "That could never be."

Do you understand the point of the illustration? Life must go on. And what we have received must be continually shared. If God could say of Himself "I am the light of the world" -- He who shed light upon us, and put the torch in our hands, who kindled the flame in our hearts, now says to us, "You shall be the light of the world." For it was never in the mind of God that He should come in Christ and give light, and then when Jesus Christ should end His earthly pilgrimage, that the world should be cast into utter darkness forever.

He who is the light of the world knows how much the world needs light. How often they must have gathered together and lamented the sad state of the world, even as you and I do now. It's one of the marks of advancing age, isn't it, to bemoan the times, to decry the fact that ours is a generation bent on hell. It's an accepted fact that, generally speaking, it's always easier to do evil than to do good. Left to ourselves, without guidance, without support, we'd always prefer evil. That was the shape and the mood of the world as Jesus surveyed it.

But it was also a world that God loves -- loved it so much that God says, "I won't let it go to hell. I'll give them light, and in that light they will walk in the way of love and in truth. So Jesus came. Do you think for a single minute that once He came He'd let us slip back into the darkness forever? So He called His disciples and said, "You, now, you are the light of the world."

You know, of course you do, that when Jesus came there came light the like of which the world had never known before. One remembers quickly the

epitaph that the people on the island had chosen for a man who came to them with the light of God's love in his life. They had never known anyone so committed to Jesus Christ. And after he had finished his earthly pilgrimage they marked his grave with these perfectly eloquent words:

"Before he came to us there was no
light; after he went away there
was no darkness."

That's what happened to our world, in Jesus Christ, He who is the Light.

What does light do? You could finish this sermon for yourself -- you know exactly what light does.

Light, for one thing, reveals. It's a wise purchaser who takes the piece of cloth and says, "let me take it out into the light and carefully examine it." It's the wise purchaser of a house, who even with a flashlight, might probe into the recesses of every corner and every room and every closet, and the niches of the ceiling in the attic, looking for tell-tale traces. Light reveals.

Light reveals strength and weaknesses. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world and Jesus Christ came into our world...by His light He reveals our weaknesses. This is one reason why some people are afraid of Jesus Christ. He shows us up for what we are. It was Simon Peter -- he had never said anything like this until he was encountered by Jesus Christ.....

"Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a -- -- (what?)

-- for I am a sinful man."

Light reveals the sin in human nature.

Light reveals. This light of God's truth reveals the lines of love upon the face of God. Never did men know how much God loves them until Jesus

Christ came. I honestly believe for myself, that as far as morality was concerned, as far as broad general principles of religion was concerned, as far as a program of ethics is concerned, the world had some mighty high standards before Jesus came.....

....He didn't come preaching religion as such

.....He didn't come preaching morality as such

.....He didn't come preaching ethics as such

He came as the embodiment of love. It's the one great thing that He gave us - - love - - God's love, full and free, a kind of love so wonderful that sometimes it chastens us and rebukes us and condemns us, it might correct us and reprove us. This is what love does. This is what light does...it reveals.

Do you know that sometimes God gives this to a Christian, that through that person and in that person we might see something of the love of God. The little boy who went with his daddy into the cathedral and saw the stained-glass windows, and said, "Daddy, who are those people in those windows?"

And he said, "Those are the pictures of the saints"

And the little boy said, "And why do you call them saints?"

And the dad replies, "We call them saints because the light shines through them."

We've met some people like that, who have made it easier for us to believe in the love of God because of a sacrificial love they embody. We've met some people who have been to us as a rebuke, who have revealed for us our sins. That's why some people can't stand to be in the presence of certain others, since they have a way of serving as a search-ray, as an X-ray into the depth of their heart. They begin really to see themselves for the wicked creatures

as they are. Light reveals.

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Another thing that light does -- it shines! Because that's the real nature and character of light. It's meant to shine. That's why our Blessed Lord could say to His disciples, "Don't hide your light -- let it shine." For a very brief vacation period last summer we went to the Thousand Islands. It's a fascinating experience, to take the boat and go in and out of those islands, and to see the houses that are built on a tiny spot of land.

There is one which is a castle. I've forgotten the man's name, maybe you remember it. He had come to this country from the old world. They have castles in certain places on certain hills in the old world, as you know. He always had the dream to build for himself a castle, on an island all of his own. And he had the money by which to do it. And he had an inspiration that would prompt him to do it. For he, too, had a great love. So he ordered that the castle be built for his wife.

I don't know how many millions of dollars they put into it, but it stands to this day, incomplete.....fine, woodworking frames still uncrated. His wife died before it was completed -- the one for whom he was building his castle.....and he issued the order -- the work must stop, never to be resumed. He had light in his heart, the light of love.....but he stopped it.

It was never meant to be that way. Life was meant to go on and to this day, when you visit the Thousand Islands as a tourist, you pay your money, you go up, you walk around --- the incomplete structure -- a monument to a dream, a romantic dream -- serving no useful purpose whatsoever.

Oh, I should have added.....there are about six or seven different units on the island itself, surrounding the incompleated castle. And one of those

units was completed. The power plant. It functioned briefly until once it was struck by lightning and thrown out of commission.....as though the very forces from Heaven protested. The light of love was meant to shine.....on and on.

One final word. Light not only reveals. Light also serves as a guide. Those several summers ago when we wandered about the West -- was it Montana or Wyoming? -- at night, overrunning ourselves, you see, a foolhardy thing, we should have stopped miles back. But now in the darkness in the night, aware of the fact that we were running out of gas. How we looked longingly for just one light in the distance that might guide us to a town, and a gas station, that our destination, for that point at least, would be completed. A light serves as a beacon, as a guide.

Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the Light of the world" is the light on the way to Heaven, for no man comes unto the Father but by Him. There is no other name by which we can be saved.

You and I are the light of the world. Is there anybody that you know who might find his way on the highway to Heaven because of the light that you've set shining?

"Let your light so shine before men that they
may see your good works and glorify your Father
who is in heaven."

....then you shall fulfill your purpose aright.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

SINNER'S PROFILE: CHIEF TEMPTER

"Sinner's Profile", the basic theme underlying each of the sermons to be preached from this pulpit during the Lenten season. Does any among you need justification for such a series? Does any among you require justification for such a title?

Many of you may recall the late and beloved pastor of the Church of the Reformation on Capitol Hill, Dr. Oscar Blackwelder, who, as it is reported to me, had his own definition for the Lenten season. If I remember correctly, it went something like this....Lent is holding up aloft the Cross of Christ, that by its light we may read the fine print in our lives.

What one reads sometimes in fine print can be somewhat alarming, and disturbing. Sometimes it's only in the fine print of a contract that we receive a specific jolt, see things exactly as they are. If Lent, then, should be for you holding aloft the Cross of Christ, that by its light you might read the fine print in your life, you may not be very much flattered by what you read. It could be disarming....it could be reading the hard facts of life exactly as they are.

And what will you see, when by the light of the Cross you read the fine print of your life? You and I will see ourselves exactly for what we are - - sinners. For any true picture that you draw of yourself will eventually emerge as the profile of a sinner.

The Church keeps reminding us of this. That's the way we begin our worship every time we gather together. Once we invoke God's blessing upon us, then we're honest enough to tell Him that we've been His disobedient children. Isn't that what we say when we put it on this time-honored fash-

ion - - "We poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean . . . "?

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There are many blessings that come to us as a staff in Saint Luke Church. As a staff, as you may know, at mid-day we go to the Chapel of the Grateful Heart. We go there not only for the edification of our own souls, but we also go in your behalf....it's a time, likewise, of intercession. But it seems that the overflow of what happens in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart follows, as a little handful we go down into the kitchen and have our lunch together. There around the common table we have conversation. In the inner recesses of my mind I've made a kind of note of how often those conversations have theological overtones, as though the Chapel of the Grateful Heart itself spills down into the kitchen - - as though any blessing from the shadow of an altar permeates the table.

In our discussions we may deal with issues, we may deal with problems. It's gratifying to note that it's the younger member of our staff who every now and then, when we're dealing with a problem, says, "Well, that's original sin for you - - this is the result of the depravity of human nature."

Augustine set all of this in motion, you see, and Augustine was simply echoing what he heard the Apostle Paul say....and Paul knew this only out of his own experience because he referred to himself as "chief of sinners" - -

" . . . the good that I would do I don't get done - - what

I don't want to do, I do . . . "

If Lent is holding aloft the Cross of Christ, that by its light we may read the fine print of our lives, then it's the profile of a sinner that you and I see.

But this is not the only thing to be said. Oscar Blackwelder is only

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half right, if this is all he'd allow us to think about it. Surely he did go on and say to us, undoubtedly he did in one way or another, that by the light of the Cross you see the fine print of your life and see yourselves as the sinners you are - - - this same light from the Cross reveals the face of God in Jesus Christ.....that as it reveals the sinfulness of human nature, it reveals the Saviourhood of God.

So Lent reminds us that I am a sinner - - that God who came to us in Christ redeems. Sinner that I am, I am not meant to go to Hell. This, too, is the message of the Church. May I suggest that if you were given to characterizing the preaching that you hear from this pulpit Sunday after Sunday, I would earnestly desire that you could walk away and say, and there were always those two strands.....

" . . . I am a sinner . . . "

" . . . I am a sinner for whom God gave His life
in Christ, to rescue me from the torments
of the damned . . . "

Let these be the two things that you hear repeatedly:

" . . . Sinners - - - saved by the grace of God . . . "

Now maybe it can be put this way: we think either too little or too much of our sinning. A man could err in either direction. Not to talk enough of his sins, he knows little need of the Saviour. To talk only of his sins, to minimize the joy of the fact that he's being redeemed. Who is the most joyful among people? - - the sinner saved by grace! They used to say it, in other generations, maybe it's because we don't call ourselves sinner enough that we don't appreciate the joy of the redeemed.....they used to say, even

Scripturally so, something about singing the songs of the redeemed. So Lent reminds us: we are sinners -- but we're sinners who are being redeemed.

Now as over against all of this, which is prefatory for this sermon, prefatory for the entire series, we come now to deal with the Gospel lesson for this day, which is a study in temptation. Sinners are always struggling souls. Sinners are those who are always being tempted. But don't shy away from that word tempt. It's a perfectly good one....so much so that our Blessed Lord saw fit to write it into the prayer that He wanted to give us as a pattern. He put the words in our mouths, when He said, "Pray.....lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. . . ." It's a word that can't be ignored, because it's written largely in the fabric of life itself. The preferred way of thinking of that word tempt is not necessarily to think in terms of seducing into evil -- enticing -- but rather testing one. For every temptation experience, no matter what you may think of it, is essentially a time of testing.

Those of us who know ourselves to be sinners are struggling along with one temptation after another to the very day that we die. Even our Blessed Lord -- no sinner was He -- yet He did not escape. In the Gospel lesson for today we deal with that testing experience of His in the wilderness. And it almost seems as though God Himself is the chief tempter. You remember how the verse reads:

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

You can read it properly that God is allowing this thing, and it's to be understood as the time of testing.

It might be helpful to you to note that this experience happened according to a schedule, according to a plan. Honestly it did!

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil . . . "

" . . . Then . . . " Something had preceded this thing.

You know what had preceded it.....the time of His baptism, when the Divine Imprimatur, as it were, was stamped upon Jesus Christ.....

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased - - "

No sooner had this occurred, than the time of testing sets in.

Now if the time of testing was on the agenda in the life of Jesus Christ, then are we to believe that it will not be on our agenda too? Well, sinners though we are, sinners that we are, acknowledge (1) acknowledgment: we will be undergoing one testing experience after another. And what is the purpose of a test? The answer is obvious.....to reveal strength, to reveal weakness. The purpose of any test is that we might improve, that we might benefit by it.

And maybe when it's all said and done, even in an academic situation, more lessons are taught in one testing period than might have been taught in all the lessons that preceded it, because this is the moment of revelation. So don't shy away from the fact that we will have to undergo temptation - - take the word in the other sense, testing.

The next thing that needs to be said is that invariably the more we love the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we're going to be tested. You may draw this deduction from the fact that God's own Son was tested. The adversary

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doesn't waste his time on those he can get easily. Mark you this and mark it well, the more you desire to please God, the more vigorously the adversary will assault you. Didn't I read somewhere weeks ago, in preparation for this sermon, that very homely illustration, that a cat doesn't go after a dead mouse - - that the cat pursues most vigorously the one that's most active, the mouse that's most alive! The more intent you become in your desire to serve Jesus Christ, the more vigorous will be the assault against your soul. Make no mistake about it, everyone who desires to serve the Lord Jesus Christ is on the Devil's calling list. If the Scriptures reveal anything at all about human nature, it reveals the fact that human nature is constantly being tested.

And that leads to the next thing. When the Tempter comes, he never comes just once. Why are we so prone to error in this direction? We think that once we have had our bout, that we've got it made from that moment on. But, please don't misunderstand me, what I'm now saying is to be taken very, very carefully. In a certain sense, you never have it made in the Christian experience, because you and I are always subject to temptation! We are sinners to the very day that we die - - we are in the process of being redeemed, the stamp and the seal of God is upon us, especially in our baptism....but Martin Luther himself said a man needs to be baptized daily. I give this to you on good authority, my friend - - when our Blessed Lord went through the temptation, the testing, experience, in the wilderness, He did not say to Himself, "Now this is over! I drift freely toward the Gate, the Gate of Heaven itself." But there is a translation of Scripture that puts it clearly, does it not, when it says....."Then the devil left him for a season."

No man is ever tempted just once and forever. Even in the life of

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Jesus Christ, don't you remember, when He turned to Peter, of all people, and said, "Satan - get behind me." When you anticipate the end of the Lenten season and you think of the Garden of Gethsemane...what is Gethsemane but, again, soul-struggle, but, again, temptation, testing...."Father, isn't there some other way?" Testing, in the spiritual sense, always implies the desire to take a way other than God's.

The last thing that needs to be said is this, going back, remembering the words: sinner though I am, I was not meant for Hell. Say it to yourself, say it over and over again, "I don't have to go to Hell."

....sinner that I am, God loves me. God comes to
redeem me through Jesus Christ."

The angels were waiting to support, to sustain and to strengthen even the Son of God. So God surrounds us. We are sinners with divine assistance. Can you enumerate for yourself the assistance that you have by God? - - even in the time of temptation, even in the time of testing?

- - in your hour of trial, remember that even the
Son of God pleads in your behalf.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer by Pastor Shaheen
February 12, 1967

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WE KNOW full well, O GOD, that this is not the first time we've turned to Thee prayerfully, even on this day. Did we not have waking thoughts that were thoughts of Thee, of Thy goodness and Thy mercy, of our obligation to fulfill, dutifully, those things that would please Thee, and bring honor to Thy Holy Name?

But ere we leave this place, O GOD, we turn to Thee now, to offer a word of intercession, in behalf of those who find it extremely difficult to remain faithful; they have their moments when it's easier to be good, but then they have their moments when it's far easier to succumb, when the pressures become greater. Have mercy upon us, O GOD, when we criticize and condemn, when we may not know in any way the depth of the struggle, the blackness of the night, through which they wander alone. We pray for them, O GOD.

And we would pray for any among us now in this place for whom another time of testing has come, a time of testing in the doubt of another, of another's faith, in the unwillingness to accept the fervent desire of another to persevere patiently, in the unwillingness to accept the fact that one's eyes could be blinded, and until the scales fall, there could be aimless wandering. O GOD, have mercy upon us, as we do not help them in their time of testing, but even withdraw.

O GOD, we pray for Thy Holy Church throughout all the world, in its time of testing, when it is so easy to reflect the culture of the day, when it is so easy to become anything except a suffering servant. O GOD, we pray for Thy Church throughout all the world.

O GOD, we pray for those who would prosper the cause of peace, who would erase the scars of hatred, who would become instruments by Your hand by which man could learn to live with one another, and always for their good.

HEAR our prayer, O GOD, forgive each of us his every sin, keep before us the hope of Heaven.

OUR FATHER.....

SINNER'S PROFILE: WHO DISCOURAGE FAITH

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Today's sermon is the second in the Lenten series being preached these Sunday mornings with the underlying theme "Sinner's Profile." For if, as you may recall it was put last Sunday in the words of another pastor, Lent is holding aloft the light of the Cross that by its light we may read the fine print of our lives, then that purpose is being fulfilled as Sunday by Sunday and day by day, as we journey toward Calvary, we allow the light of God's love and God's truth to penetrate into the depth of our minds and of our hearts.

If God were to send this morning a special representative of His to Saint Luke congregation, and he appeared at this hour while you were assembled in this place, and God's especially chosen representative stood by each one, and put the question to you: "Do you love the Lord Jesus, and do you endeavor to serve Him in your daily life?"

...you know what your answer would be....some of you answering perhaps a bit more quickly than others - yet none of you with undue hesitation, would answer in the affirmative. So we consider ourselves as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, as men who walk after the Master.

But it's always a surprising thing to discover that we can be sinners!that we can be the ones who disappoint God!....that we can be the ones who render Him a disservice, and become not only stumbling-blocks to ourselves but stumbling-blocks to other people as well.

This is a truth that's made plain to us, by implication at least, when

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you study the Gospel lesson for today. You want to talk about the disciples, not about the Syro-Phoenician woman. Oh, of course, the figure of Jesus Christ stands over and above everything. But our purpose is better served, for our edification at least, by bringing into clear and sharp focus the behavior of the disciples. If grades would have been handed out that day, from the legendary book of the record, the disciples would not have made passing marks. They wouldn't fare very well.

For as you read this account, they were given a golden opportunity to encourage a woman in her faith, and they didn't do it. In case you don't recall all the facts -- it's a startling passage in Scripture -- let me recall them for you very quickly.

Our Blessed Lord had come to earth to love people. Our Blessed Lord had come to earth to let them see, first-hand, what God is like. And after He had wandered around a bit, He discovered that there were those who rejected Him, and they built a camp of hostility and refused to believe Him, to trust Him. They were His own people who were doing this. You'd find it extremely difficult to believe that this could happen.

Knowing full well, however, that it had occurred, the record reveals for us that Jesus Christ now, for the first time, goes into non-Jewish territory, turns His back temporarily upon His own people. Now it may have been that He sought a brief respite, it may have been that He did this for the disciples' sake, that they may not lose their divine perspective. Whatever the reason, the record has it that now, for the first time, He is outside Jewish territory.

But lo and behold, while He's there (His reputation, you see, had pre-

ceded Him), a woman comes, and she asks for a blessing. It must have been a very delightful thing for Jesus to know that this could happen. When His own people had refused to accept Him, here was someone "outside the faith" -- who came with the belief, or at least indicated that she was willing to boldly lay claim to a blessing that He would give.

It's a comforting thing to read ever so frequently in Scripture how there were those who came and surprised Jesus Christ, with the character and the quality of their faith....

...do you remember that other man -- this man, too, not a Jew, but a Roman Centurian -- who came with so great faith and said, "Jesus, work a miracle in behalf of this servant of mine. Oh, Jesus, you don't even have to come to my house! -- you don't even have to touch the afflicted one....just speak the word and it will be done!" ...how surprised with joy, and what a deep measure of satisfaction it must have brought to Jesus to see such faith, such trust, such willingness to believe in Him!

...then there was the time when He was going into Jericho, and up there peering down through the branches of the tree, a man who wanted so desperately to make a friend of Jesus. Christ observes this embryonic faith of Zacchaeus -- delighted by it.

...and there was the time when some people came to Jesus where He had met, in a little enclosure, and they found a hole in the roof and they literally dumped an afflicted person in front of Jesus Christ. This gesture on their part is an act of faith! -- "You're able to do it, Jesus -- go on!"

...how deeply gratified He must have been to discover in people the willingness to let Him be all that He wanted to be -- to bring a blessing into their lives.

Now on this occasion, she's not a Jewess, she's a Syro-Phoenician woman, and she comes and asks a blessing at the hand of Jesus Christ. Oh, what a golden moment the disciples could have had. They could have said, "Jesus, look at her. She's never so much as heard of the Ten Commandments! Jesus, she hasn't had the benefits that we've had, and yet she believes in you! What can we do to help her? What can we do to encourage her?"

...but they didn't talk like that.

But to the contrary they said, "Get rid of her!"
It was a gesture of ruthless impatience....."Let's quiet her."

Jesus, of course, saw this evidence of young faith, not fully blossomed, but enough there by which to see that a miracle could be promised. And so what - - - he puts her through this very difficult dialogue....read it for yourself, it doesn't make easy reading and it may take a bit of doing on your part to have complete faith in the way Jesus Christ handled her. But all the time remember that there's nothing more precious in God's sight than faith fully blossomed! So He wanted her to understand that He just doesn't take those divine fingers of His and reach for a celestial shelf and pull down a miracle and say, "Now here it is.....be on your way." It isn't just the granting of a physical favor.

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To see Jesus Christ as one who reaches toward the celestial counter is to make a magician-of-sorts of Him. And a magician is one thing that God isn't! Miracle-worker -- yes! But a miracle-worker only because His primary concern is to work the miracle of faith! -- the miracle not of the body, but the miracle of the soul. And He had a greater blessing for her than simply restoring a body to a measure of health. He knew that she was possible of having Him say to her in the end, "O woman, great is thy faith."

So the disciples, mark you, were no part whatsoever in the cultivation and the development of that faith. And they were the ones who had been with Jesus Christ for some time. They were the ones who knew how He wanted to deepen a person's faith. They were the ones who had been exposed to the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. And now....they discouraged faith!

Beloved, you and I are disciples. You and I have been exposed to Jesus Christ. You and I are those who walk in the company of the redeemed. We listen to the preaching of His words....we come to Bible study classes, and we would root and ground ourselves in the teachings of Scripture. If anyone would have said to any of the disciples, "Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Is He your Master?" -- they would have said, "Yes."

If anyone were to say to you, "Do you love the Lord Jesus? Is He your Master?" -- you would say, "Yes." I would say, "Yes."

But this is a realistic reading of the Word. They discouraged this woman's faith! Of course she cried out awkwardly...or course, to you, in the vocabulary of our day, she had an unsophisticated approach. But at least she was looking toward God....and they just wouldn't have it.

I'm wondering if, when it's all said and done, if there is any greater sin, committed on the part of believers, than to discourage faith on the part of other people. May I share with you several illustrations, maybe out of your life, maybe out of your condition.

The man who baptized me, confirmed me in the Faith, who first made plain to me that God meant me for a minister of the Gospel, a grand and a good shepherd of souls, who shepherded that congregation through strain and stress for over thirty-some years.....I heard him sadly relate one time a very unusual thing, I had never heard it expressed like this....

To a company of people he said, "I'm convinced that one of the crippling things in the Christian church is the Sunday dinner hour."

Naturally we asked him to explain. This was his explanation. He said, "I have reason to believe that in too many homes in the parish that I serve, it's during the Sunday dinner hour that people talk unkindly, without love, about the Sunday School teacher....about the Sunday School superintendent....about the choir director....about the choir itself.... ..about the church deacons.....about the preacher....about the parsonage family." He did not say it sarcastically. He was a good man.

And then he gave us evidence for the measure of sadness in his voice. He said, "I know that when this kind of conversation takes place, there are children present, and wittingly or unwittingly, the cause of Faith is being damaged when children are exposed to this kind of thing. What encouragement do they have to become Sunday School teachers?...what encouragement do they have to become Sunday School superintendents?...to sing in the choir?....to serve on Church Council....to become a pastor?

This grand and noble man of God was talking about church people, talking about his own flock.....a crippling institution, the Sunday dinner hour, when this happens. For you see, how is faith being encouraged by this kind of thing?

Illustration #2: Serving on the Board of World Missions, some of us were assigned to different committees. One of the committees is missionary personnel. So often we looked forward to interviewing the candidates, the young men and the young women, spirited, capable, committed, who in their 20's, mind you, would be perfectly willing to pack up and go to Southeast Asia, to Africa, to be a missionary for Jesus Christ -- to teach in the industrial school, to work with the lepers. And every now and then, much to our sorrow, we discovered a candidate who would say, "But could you help me at this point -- my parents don't understand. They discourage me, they don't want me to go."

Illustration #3: When I meet with the Lutheran Deaconess Community Board, we're always saddened by the fact that we're getting fewer and fewer candidates for the Diaconate. For years we had three deaconesses who served as recruiting agents, who covered the whole United States and a part of Canada. It was not at all unusual when they came back and said, "We discovered any number of people that we thought could represent their Lord well in the Diaconate, but we were never able to overcome the opposition of certain members of the family circle."

In the time of Judgment, one of the things that I fear most is how Jesus Christ will put His finger upon me and say, "But there was that time when you might have encouraged, and you did not. Even your silence

became a gesture of discouragement, to say nothing of the times that you did speak disparagingly."

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I try always to allow God to discover me with an earnest mind and spirit when I come to the sacred desk. But never more so, perhaps, than right now, when I think of the way God is opening the heart of some of our young people. They do have their moments when God is real to them. And I shudder to think when sometimes those of us who are older give them no encouragement whatsoever, either by the way we speak unkindly, or without full support for the Cause of Christ, or when we deliberately try to point their lives in other directions.

In the final analysis, I wonder if there is any greater sin than the believer's sin.....who discourages faith.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
February 19, 1967

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GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise Thee for Thy goodness and for Thy mercy. We walk constantly by Thy grace and by Thy favor. Every need is being supplied. We are not in want.

Yet in all honesty, as we approach Thee, this becomes our prayer: Forgive us when we walk as the ungrateful ones, talk as the unregenerate ones, walk as the unbelieving ones.

We recall only the days of the past week. We are ashamed.

But rather than be crippled by such sinfulness, redeem us and quicken us into renewed hope and confidence.

We think of the lack of trust we have in one another and our eagerness to question another's motivation. As we expect You to deal graciously with us, so may we treat one another, graciously.

OUR FATHER, we pray for one another, for those who delight in loving and serving Thee, and through this congregation, who without hesitation assume positions of responsibility and trust. Give us a grateful heart for what they offer to Thee in this way.

HEAVENLY FATHER, we pray for the ill, for the afflicted, whom we name in our hearts before Thee now.

HEAVENLY FATHER, we pray for those who are separated from loved ones, for those who serve under Colors, and especially for those in South Asia, in Vietnam.

Hear the prayers of these Thy people as they ascend from the depth of their hearts. Give them a Father's blessing. And may each of us walk hence-forward as Thy obedient children.

OUR FATHER.....

"CANCER OF THE HEART"

Notes on an address delivered by R.S. in Williamsport, Pennsylvania on Thursday, February 23, 1967, at the Annual Meeting of their chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews

Allow me to tell you how happy I am to be here tonight.

Yesterday while making pastoral calls in Silver Spring, I discovered some crocuses on a protected plot whose gentle slope is warmed by the sun. It was the first sign of spring -- my favorite season. And I immediately admit that I have not always heeded the philosopher Santayana's advice: "It is better to develop an interest in the changing seasons than to fall hopelessly in love with Spring." My second admission -- I am hopelessly in love with Williamsport.

(here was related Leo Williamson's favorite story of the Methodist preacher who went from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to Watertown, New York)

Here I was born and within a few miles of this spot I grew up as a lad. From within the shadows of these hills I found my bride. Our two sons were born here and in South Williamsport I began my ministry. What warmth remains in my heart for Messiah's Church, whose people were the first to call me Pastor and to allow me to know the meaning of the word. So it is with much joy that I welcome the invitation to return for this engagement and to share your fellowship this night.

Now as to the topic of my address. It is inspired by a prayer that has become very much a part of my life. Simply stated, it is this:

"Anything, God, but hate."

Hate is like the cancer of the heart. I have seen it in my day.

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I have seen it close at hand. I have only to recall the impressionable days of my youth when there was related to me how students from St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, presumably on their way home from a classroom session dealing with the Reformation period, spit on the steps of St. Paul's Lutheran Church at the corner of 4th and Center Streets, several blocks removed from the very place in which we meet this night.

As a lad growing up in Montoursville, I recall with what pride it was made known that there wasn't a single Jew in the community and that the only Roman Catholic family -- the Beattys -- lived on the edge of town. I recall how the name of Al Smith, in his bid for the Presidential office, was treated with scorn, ridicule and contempt.

Anything, God, but hate. I have seen it in my day.

Then in my first trip abroad there was that Sunday afternoon when I visited Lidice, not far from that wonderful, wonderful city called Prague. That excursion on that Sunday afternoon took me to what had once been a peaceful village. You remember the factors, don't you? Heydrich had been the despised Nazi commandant. The loyal and faithful Czech people found him more than they could stomach. A group of partisans waylaid him as his auto made a turn in the road. Heydrich was killed. His successor swore complete revenge. Heydrich's killers were traced to that little village of Lidice. That hate may have its day, the women and the children were carted off to concentration camps. The men and boys were shot in cold

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blood, lined up against the side of a barn. They were buried in a mass grave. Once the houses in the village were plundered, fire was set to all the buildings. The town was leveled to the ground. The debris was piled underneath. That the obliteration would be final, the town was planted as a corn field. Where once had been a town, there now was a corn field. So I say to you, anything, God, but hate. I have seen it in my day. It can eat a man's heart away.

There was the time when on the Orient Express we neared the Polish border, and a Jewish traveling companion, Maurice Tennenbaum, left our group to visit a concentration camp. Had I not seen in Warsaw days later -- in the interim until Tennenbaum and I met again -- the films which were used as documentary evidence in the war-time trial at Nuremburg, I would not have believed what he told me.

They were the vats in which human flesh had been boiled. They were the stacks of cakes of soap made from human flesh. They were lamp shades made from tanned human skins. They were the hill-like heaps of skeletal remains to be shoved by bulldozers into an open pit.

Anything, God, but hate. I have seen it in my day. It can eat a man's heart away.

There was that day when I visited what had been the Jewish sector in Warsaw -- a city which refused to die. If my memory serves me aright, the entire ghetto was completely leveled and I don't think you could have found two bricks with mortar remaining intact.

Anything, God, but hate. I have seen it in my day.

Now hate, I say to you, is born of prejudice, and what is it to be prejudiced?

To be prejudiced is to pre-judge. It is to form an opinion before all the evidence is in -- before the case has been fully considered. And the tragic thing is that it may have no foundation in fact.

Do you recall the child's nursery rhyme:

I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know, and know full well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell.

But now that I'm a little bit older I think I know why the subject of our nursery rhyme did not like Dr. Fell. Somewhere along the line in his development as an individual he had acquired a prejudice and never took himself to task for it.

Now let me suggest for you ways by which we can handle this thing called hate.

First off, let it be said that a child is not born with hatred in his heart. Prejudices are acquired. It's a far cry from the school child who asked: "Mommy, just what's the name of those people I'm supposed to hate?" to the character introduced to me by my barber, a devout Roman Catholic, who with sadness in his voice related the story of a man stranded on a desert isle.

Having been shipwrecked, he found himself the sole survivor and eked out his existence in his loneliness. Years later he was discovered and he showed the visitor to his island what he had done with his own hands, the well he had dug, the huts he had constructed, the two churches he had built.

"Hold on a minute," exclaimed the island's first visitor, "What do you mean, two churches, since you are the only person here?"

Remarked the islander, "Two churches, of course. That one - - that's the one I don't go to."

It is folly to believe that the prejudices we acquire we automatically drop as we grow older, but rather if we do not keep ourselves in check they become deepened and firmly entrenched.

Let me remind you that in his book entitled "Stability and Change in Human Characteristics", Dr. Benjamin S. Bloom of the University of Chicago states that by the time a child is four years old he has achieved 50% of his general adult intelligence. By the time he is eight the figure has reached 70%. Further, Dr. Bloom points out, as much of the child's development takes place during his first four years as in the next thirteen.

It goes without saying that a child is always listening, always observing.

Indicative of this very thing is what television's beloved "Our Miss Frances" of Ding Dong School has observed: "Most adults have a variety of prejudices, though few of us are willing to admit it. We may be aware of some of them, but others with which we live every day we probably do not recognize. Our deepest prejudices were acquired way back when we were children. Day by day, month by month and year after year we lived with these attitudes and beliefs until they became a part of our character and personality.

"How do children pick up these early prejudices? Does a two-year-old really comprehend what the adult members of his family and their friends

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are talking about? The answer is found in the theme of a play sponsored by the Conference of Christians and Jews -- "The Children Are Always Listening." They may not understand all the words they hear but they are keenly alert to tones of voice, facial expressions and gestures -- angry or argumentative, friendly or welcoming.

"One of the young child's greatest hungers is to learn, to know, to find out, and through listening and seeing he gets a wealth of information. Gradually he assimilates much of what he sees and hears.....once a child has an idea, erroneous or not, it is difficult for him to let it go."

Immediately we must say to ourselves, it could be that if you want to see what today's child will become, perhaps we'd better first look at ourselves. We must watch our own behavior for we are being observed silently, earnestly, by the child in our midst, and we dare not assume that what a child may learn today he may automatically unlearn later.

So we would look at ourselves, and in doing so probe our own feelings toward other people. Just now, how do we look upon our fellow man? Can it not be said at this point that it would be far better to look upon one another not with our own eyes but through the eyes of God. The most precious verse in Scripture remains: "God so loved the world . . . " And who likewise has not read the Scriptures without cherishing the thought as recorded in the beginning pages: "And God made man . . . in his image."

Wrestle as you may with the meaning of the word image -- the fact remains that it was God who made man. Therefore let us take a page from the book of the Quaker who looks "for that which is of God in every man."

So I would suggest that we heed earnestly their advice. Maybe this is one reason why I was not unduly disturbed by the Russian cosmonaut who was

supposed to have said, when he looked out of his space-craft, that he couldn't find God "out there" anywhere.

I suggest that we start looking for God within the hearts of men. Then let us see what will happen to our prejudices.

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I think of my paternal grandmother, of the Greek Orthodox faith, who with a humble and a contrite heart crawled on her hands and knees to the village church when her son was sick. As an act of devotion she interceded in his behalf until she prostrated herself anew within the walls of the church. Returning she found that the fever had left the sick son. How can I look upon the Greek Orthodox church with anything less than respect when I think of her?

There was that night atop Mt. Niessen, when my heart's desire was fulfilled to sleep atop an Alpine peak. Also to be accommodated at the hostel where sensitive souls came to see the sun-rise and the sun-set was a Roman Catholic priest from Belgium. In the morning as he went his way and I went mine, in broken English he shared a benediction. I remember his exact words: "I wish for you a safe journey all the way Home." And as he spoke the last word he punctuated it by casting his eyes heavenward.

How can I have anything save respect for this man and the church which has reared and trained him?

There was my maternal grandmother. As a child, perhaps of four or five, I remember how she came to visit in our home. I have only one memory of her. As I walked by and looked through the door, ajar, into her room, she was sitting upright in her bed as she had aroused in the morning hours, fingering her rosary. Mark you, even before she got out of bed, she was

offering her prayer to God. How can I have anything but love and respect in my heart for her and the church that had so reared and trained her in the faith?

There is my Jewish friend in Williamsport, Arthur Petter, whose kindnesses have been great to me through the years. How can I look upon him with separation, even as I recall that my blessed Lord was born a Jew? Those whom our Heavenly Father chose to cradle Him and to watch over Him did so in a Jewish home. The people who mourned His death most sorely were Jewish and those who refused to believe that He was dead and who spread the Word, now taken to almost every part of the known world, had grown up in Jewish homes.

I think of perhaps the most beloved member of the parish that I am privileged to serve.....little Anne King. She had come to our shores from Ireland and when relatives confronted by Anne hardly knew what to do with her, they put her in the Convent of Notre Dame in Baltimore. She left after six years, for anyone could see by that time that Anne was no more meant for the convent than a bird is meant for the cage. The years ran their course until that day, in the loneliness that marked her life upon the death of her husband, she found peace anew within the walls of our church. She is a woman without guile. Let me tell you as warmly as I can of her return to the convent.

Knowing that there are still those who could not appreciate the pilgrimage of her soul, she could not find it in her heart "to offend" her friends of other years. Even though she has correspondence with some of them, she has not told forthrightly of her affiliation in our parish. Then there was that day, and only those of us who know Anne can fully appreciate it, when,

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having returned to the convent, the Sister said, "And where is your parish church now, Anne?" She answered, "Silver Spring." The Sister inquired, "And what is the name of the congregation?" Without hesitation, Anne replied, "Saint Luke." Then came the question by the Sister, "What is the name of the Father in charge?" Anne hesitated only momentarily, and then, as Irish as all get-out, yet never intending to be complete deceptive, pronounced Shaheen as "Sheehan".

I could relate others. My friend Dr. McLane. We began our years together in South Williamsport, he in the field of medicine, mine in religion. I recall how he called me: "Padre, he won't have long for this world. I thought you'd like to know." So I answered the call and the vigil that I kept was also shared by my Roman Catholic physician friend, Charles Francis McLane. How often he kept the light burning on his back porch as an invitation to me to stop by and in the kitchen of his home we talked of many things, and always the theme-of-themes that characterized the conversation, his ministry and mine in meeting the needs of people. I learned years later, and after his death, that he wasn't much for carrying medals, but ever so frequently he offered an ancient prayer in which he invoked the guidance of God that he might have wisdom.

I could also recall for you the heart of that venerable soul at whose feet I was privileged to begin my ministry, the Rev. Dr. Robert G. Bennen, who decades before Vatican Council and the era of good will, invited his congregation to pray for the sick and dying Pope Pius -- was it the Twelfth?I've quite forgotten.

So you see by what I have related, the answer to prejudice is in what we regard as precious in people. Something of it, let us call it God, is in the heart of every man. It may be defaced, and our inhumanity to man may almost destroy it.

Let me close now without further comment by quoting for you: Abou Ben Adhem.....

Abou Ben Adhem - may his tribe increase -
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold.
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said:
"What writest thou?" The vision raised its head,
And with a look made all of sweet accord,
Answered: "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still; and said: "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."
The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Perhaps we'd fare much better if instead of simply looking at people as persons, that is, only as human beings, we would look upon them as something of the image of God.

Dr. Henry W. Hanson used to relate how, at a very early morning hour, he found himself in the slum section of a great city. As he entered the block he saw at the far end what appeared to be an old woman with a burlap sack thrown over her shoulders. She was stooping into the gutter and going from one portion of the sidewalk to another, picking up things.

As Dr. Hanson neared her, he offered to give her five dollars if she would tell him just what she was doing, and why.

Her reply was that she would tell him without his giving her the money, and she simply stated that before too long the street would be filled with children running barefoot. "What have I been doing?" - - as she was about to answer her own question. "I have been picking up these bits of broken bottles so that the children would not cut their feet. You see, each night the street is taken over by the drunks." I never found out whether the woman was black or white, Hebrew, Protestant, Roman Catholic. Wouldn't it be sad to admit, if necessary, that maybe she was of no religious persuasion whatsoever. Yet who would despise someone such as she, when that bit of God was shining through her soul?

"SINNER'S PROFILE: WHO STAND AGAINST GOD"

"Sinner's Profile" is the basic theme underlying all of these sermons being preached these Sunday mornings during the Lenten season. Today, the third in the series, "Sinner's Profile: Those Who Stand Against God." And the text, it's from the Gospel for the day, the words of our Blessed Lord, Luke 11:23:

"He who is not with me is against me."

Come now, was it only my imagination, or was it absolutely true that while the Gospel lesson was being read you stood unmoved! Was there no show in your faces of incredulity or indignation? Have you heard Scripture read so often that its very familiarity leaves you without any shaking to the very depth of your heart? Come now, how could we hear this passage of Scripture read, the relating of an encounter that Jesus Christ had with His enemies.....

...who when they came deliberately called Him in league with the devil. How great was their sin! Jesus Christ who is God-- standing in their midst -- having done a wonderful thing in behalf of a poor and benighted soul, having brought healing and wholeness into his life, having done a deed of compassion, having acted in their presence exactly as the way God would act, and did act! ...and then a handful of people call Him in league with the devil... ..could you not react and say to yourself, This is incredible! -- how could people treat God like that?.....could you not react with some degree

of indignation, and say, "Jesus Christ, how could you deal patiently with them? -- how could your patience even allow you to speak back to them?" For shame upon you, my friend, if in this reading of the Gospel lesson for today you showed no sign of emotion whatsoever.

For this is a bleak and terrible chapter in the life of our Lord....
...He who came to love is being hated!....He who came to serve is being slandered....He who is good is being called evil! And of all things, there are people who are deliberately standing up and saying to Jesus Christ...."We do not believe you. We will resist you. We are against you." Read the words carefully, my friend, go back and let the Gospel lesson for today speak to your soul, we particularly who are dealing with this underlying theme of "Sinner's Profile."

This is what sin can do to a man -- sin can blind a man to the fact of God -- sin can bring a man to the point where he calls good evil! Sin can bring a man to the place where he can slander Jesus Christ.

What, now, do you say to yourself, once these prefatory remarks have been made? Ought each one of us not say to himself, how can this be! What brings a man to the place where he deliberately defies Jesus Christ and stands against Him? -- to be so bold and as brazen as all that!

Well maybe we can say that it just didn't happen. It is a gross sin, but gross sins just never occur. In all likelihood no man ever gets up in the morning and says, today I will defy God. In all likelihood none of us ever says to himself, I will array against all the forces of good in this world... I will be a crusader in behalf of evil. We're not about to talk like that, and chances are that these people at the beginning did not talk like that!

This is a gross sin, when a man defies God and boldly stands against Him. And in all likelihood he did not begin to stand against God boldly, in the early days.

It may have happened that when they first heard Jesus Christ they listened attentively, gave Him some due and proper regard, and then bit by bit they began to question, bit by bit the seeds of jealousy and hatred were being sown, until ultimately you get a man on your hands who says, "I won't believe you, and not only that, I will slander you."

If this should be the case, then each should say to himself, there is no such thing at any time as a little sin. If a sin becomes gross, it's only because it was never less than sin. We are not fair with ourselves, I tell you, when we permit ourselves to talk about "little white lies." Sin is never little in the sight of God. One sin always leads to another sin. Sin is never without its corrupting influence. It was sin, in all its stark reality, that killed Jesus Christ.....it was sin, in all its stark reality, that enabled people to stand up and say to Jesus Christ, "You're in league with the Devil, that's what you are".....and maybe this is one thing that you and I can say to ourselves when we begin to take this passage seriously -- how could they get this way? -- how do you get a person who deliberately stands against Jesus Christ? One says to himself, then, well it just doesn't happen. It grows and develops, until you get a man standing boldly against Jesus Christ.

And then we say to ourselves, what is the reaction of Jesus Christ to a thing like this? You'll notice that Jesus Christ stands boldly and bravely in this encounter. You and I are not fair with ourselves when we continually

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think of Jesus as gentle and meek and mild. There are some things for which God Himself won't even stand still. He's not about to allow us, His willful children, to slander His Son. And this is the second thing that you and I must say to ourselves, when we allow ourselves to have our way with our own little sins, eventually we must have the encounter with Jesus Christ.

When a man has an encounter with Jesus Christ, you may always rest assured that Jesus Christ does not stand silent in our midst. He will not allow our sinning and our slandering to go unchallenged. It's an awesome thing to stand in the presence of Christ, even we may allow ourselves to be bold and brave. He has a way of speaking back, He has a way of drawing the lines. And that's the third thing that a man must say to himself: that even though he may try to stand against God, Jesus Christ draws a line. He says, "All right, here it is. It's sharply defined. You're either for me or against me." There is no such thing as neutrality in the Christian Faith. It's a frightening thing, isn't it, to be encountered by Jesus Christ! -- and then to have Jesus Christ draw the line and say, "Here it is. On which side are you?"

So there will come to you, my friend, the moment of truth. When and how it may come to you, I can't say, but this I do know, and this I can say, as a proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ I must say, to every man there will come either that grim or that blessed moment when he realizes that he's either for Christ or against Him.

Now can I give you a bit of helpful advice....in the meantime would you like some kind of assurance as to what your condition might be? Even our

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Blessed Lord helps us at that point. He says, "He who does not gather with me, scattereth." If you want to know whether you're on the side of Jesus Christ or not, then are you doing the type of thing that Jesus Christ did? The very thing that precipitated this encounter was Jesus Christ in an act of mercy, Jesus Christ in an act of compassion. Keep yourself busy, my friend, busy performing such deeds of compassion and love. "Be merciful one to another"is the surest test I know by which a man can guarantee satisfaction with himself, whether or not he's on the side of Jesus Christ.

Maybe you would like me to spell out the balance of this sermon in detail, to give you a kind of blueprint for Monday morning, and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday and Saturday.....but I will not walk with you hand-in-hand. I do not know where God will lead you tomorrow, in what condition you may find yourself, and the circumstances surrounding you. But I do know that if a man wants to know, the Holy Spirit will make plain to him what the Christlike thing is to be done, at any time, under any conditions or circumstances.

When I was a lad I was tremendously impressed by the writings of John Oxenham. He did a very wonderful thing for us (I wish I could put my fingers on the book -- they tell me it's out of print)....he wrote a book called, "The Hidden Years" in which he tried to reveal for us the kind of a person Jesus Christ was, from the time we find Him in the temple until the time He went out to be the Itinerant-Preacher, Miracle-Workerthe Lover-of-Men.

And I'm also reminded of what John Oxenham wrote once, when he said:

"To every man there openeth
A way and ways and a Way;
And the high soul climbs the highway,
And the low soul gropes the low;

And in between on the misty flats
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth
A way and ways, and a Way;
And each man decides the way
His soul shall go."

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It's a frightening thing, but that's the type of thing that Jesus Christ
is always saying to us.....

"You're either with me.....or against me."

Even the love of God cannot make up a man's mind for him.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SINNER'S PROFILE: WHO SPEAK DISPARAGINGLY"

The text for the sermon is from the Gospel for the day, the 9th verse of the 6th chapter of John:

"There is a lad here which hath five
barley loaves and two small fishes,
but what are they among so many?"

Isn't it a shame that he ever finished the sentence? The beginning part, you see, is quite salutary -- he had made a discovery, a precious discovery, "There's a lad here with five barley loaves and two small fishes"....
....but then he had to down-grade what he had found. If only he hadn't finished the sentence.

But let's go back now, let's deal with the historical setting.

It was the day of his popularity. No matter where Jesus went, there were throngs, this, now, presumably the greatest of all the throngs. Five thousand came out to hear Him. They listened. They had never heard anyone speak quite the way He was speaking. He gave them unforgettable pictures of God.

After listening for some time, He himself became aware of a problem: they were hungry, and many of them would faint before they ever got home. So He turns around to His disciples and He said, "Where are we going to buy bread, that these people can eat?" One of the disciples said, "Why, even if we had so great a supply as two hundred pennyworth, we wouldn't have enough to feed them." And another disciple picked it up and said, "There's a boy here with

his lunch.....but what's that against so great a problem?"

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Ah, now, pick it up at that point -- against so great a problem -- -- against so great a need that has to be met. You've recognized at once, haven't you, that Jesus Christ called their attention to the need that had to be met. This is the point at which we must always begin. Life always has its problems. You have your problem in one way or another....we have our problems, collectively speaking, our problems as a country, our problems as a state, our problems as a nation.....our problems as a world! Small wonder, then, that Harry Emerson Fosdick, when he used to go over from Riverside Church to teach in the Homiletics Department at Union Seminary, used to say to his students, "Remember when you go to the sacred desk, when you stand up to preach and you look at your congregation, there's a problem behind every face, there's a problem in every heart."

One doesn't have to establish the fact, does he, that problems surround us on every hand? Yet it's amazing how many people there are who go through life seemingly oblivious to the fact that they're surrounded by problems!and in all the unsettlement, God raises up a solitary soul, every now and then, whose primary task at the beginning is to say, "You've got a problem on your hand."

Recognize this immediately for what it's worth.....none of the disciples came to Jesus and said, "We have a problem on our hand." We've no indication that any of the pressing multitude came and said, "Feed us." But it's God in Christ who recognizes the problem. This is the kind of God we happen to have! -- -- a God who made us.....but a God not only who made us, but a God who is always putting His finger upon our spiritual pulsebeat, a God who is always

assessing and evaluating how things are, and then if need be, He calls to our attention the problem in front of us, even though we may have never so much as recognized it.

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I'm wondering what would happen if at this point in the sermon we endeavored to do something uniquely. Suppose you were dismissed right now, only for a little while, and we'd go out and we'd get into our cars.....and I would say to you, that for the preaching of the balance of this sermon we'll form a caravan of cars, and perhaps I, as your Pastor, will be in the lead car, and we'll have two-way communication...

....and as we drive hither and yon through the Silver Spring area, let's see if you discover any needs along the way, let's see if you become aware of any existing problems. Suppose as we drove I lead you now through an apartment complex, when as they say, the cars remain fairly impact, one after another in the parking areas, in the apartment complex, until maybe early afternoon.....now we're charting our way and we're going through the maze of cars.....anybody say, "I see a problem" here?

...anybody see any evidence of concern for the needs
of people?

...suppose our caravan takes us through an area of Silver Spring less than six minutes away from where you are right now, an area where the disadvantaged live, the culturally deprived. And as we travel on Brookville Road.....anybody going to spot that single water hydrant for a whole cluster of houses?.....anybody going to become aware at all of the needs, the problems to be met?

....or suppose, in this unique endeavor, instead of going in the caravan

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at all, we had ample space here, under the roof of Saint Luke Church in its Christian Education units, and we broke up in little groups of three or four, and you spend 20 - 25 minutes with each other, one person with three others. And after the 25 minutes were up, who among you might become aware of the need in the hearts and souls of a small handful of people with whom you have been associating?

I shan't quote it for you correctly, I wish I could, but you'll get enough of it to register.....John C. Bennett, Union's Seminary President, saying, that "We'll not be saved today by the depth of our theology, nor will we be saved by the warmth of our piety, but we'll be saved by our sensitivity to the needs of other people." Now this is the point at which you begin in this miracle story: Jesus Christ standing up and saying, "There's a need here that needs to be met." God has His moments when He raises up somebody who, in the role of God, brings to our attention a problem.

Oh, when you thumb your way through the Good Book, page after page, you're fairly delighted to discover a God who is a God of comfort, Jesus Christ whose arms are outstretched, "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest".....a kind of God, you see, that we say gently pats us on the shoulder and comforts us, and wipes away the tears from our eyes. Now we cling tenaciously to this concept of God! - - and we treasure the pages in the Bible where He's portrayed in this way.

But how about the other nature of God? - - you'll let me put it that way, won't you? - - - not so much the God-of-comfort as the God-of-challenge,as revealed so completely in Jesus Christ who says, "What are you going

to do about it?".....who names the problem, and just stands there.

You know, there does come a time when God refuses to move, just because He's waiting for you and me to move first. There are some things that not even God will do by Himself. So He turns to us, in Jesus Christ, with that look of challenge on His face....."What will you do about it?"

Well there's another group of people, I suppose, as somebody once said, who may become aware of the problem, but then all they ever do is go around and simply state and re-state the problem. It never quite occurs to them that maybe there could be an answer.....but they hang their heads, they have tears in their words, they wring their hands.....and simply go on stating and re-stating the problem. But all the while Jesus Christ stands there and says, "Do something."

There comes a time when not even praying will be the answer that's acceptable to God. You remember the homespun illustration I used to share with you. In a little village there was an emergency that had to be met. A family had been burned out. The deacons in the church said, "What should we do?" Somebody said, "Let's have a prayer meeting." So the deacons gathered to pray -- deploring the fact that one of their number didn't even show up.

Shortly after they had begun their praying, they heard a noise outside, and there was a youngster with a wagon (the little express wagon, you know, of yesteryear).....on it bags of flour and some groceries.....and the timid youngster said, half-shyly, "Pap couldn't make the prayer meeting, but he thought maybe you'd be needing something like this."

Then there are people who, once they are made aware of the problem, begin to look around, and they make a kind of discovery, just as Andrew did, "Why, there's a boy here....five barley loaves...two small fishes - - but what are they among so many?"

....if only he hadn't spoken so disparagingly!

Nothing, I say to you, absolutely nothing, no matter how small, is insignificant in God's sight. He has a way of making a lot out of little. He'd probably do it more often than seemingly occurs if it weren't for our failure to offer to Him the nearest thing at hand....down-grading it just because it seems so small, so unpromising.

You are remembering, aren't you, that the under-lying theme of this series of sermons these Sunday mornings during Lent is "Sinner's Profile". Much of our sinning isn't big-style sinning. So much of our sinning is in these little things, such a little thing as speaking disparagingly of what happens to be nearest at hand and what doesn't seem very promising. Yet this miracle would never have occurred if the boy hadn't said, "Take it."

There's a miracle for you: to believe that a little could help answer a problem of great magnitude. Of course this is where you and I find ourselves most often - - what can I do? Yet I submit to you, granted all other things being equal, as long as a man lives and breathes, possessing a fair amount of his faculties, he's meant to serve a useful purpose. There's always some need that can be met, even though he may have little.

Now let me deal specifically with something out of our life here in Saint Luke Church. Two of our members, driving along Brookville Road.....they did

have their eyes open, they were made sensitive to the culturally-deprived areas, to the disadvantaged who live there, and whether he said to her, or she said to him, "Something ought to be done"

....and so you get a Konrad

and a Georgia Mueller, who without coming to a Church Council, without asking for a congregational meeting, begin with the little that they had nearest at hand, an hour or two a week, and they go themselves and sit down in the homes.....and eventually others follow, too, you see. That's the way miracles happen! You never down-grade the little. You begin with what you have.

And I'm willing to believe that God has given everyone enough by which to begin! She's a grandmother-physician, she is. She and her husband left Wilmington, Delaware, with that wonderful practice that they had, at the prime of their lives. And then they went half a world away, to Kathmandu, and sacrificed for ten years.

She came back. She was a guest in Bethany. There were seven of us who sat around the table while she told of the need, where in Kathmandu, in all of Nepal, that tiny kingdom, in fact -- by the time anyone and everyone becomes 18 he has had tuberculosis -- 100%!

After she finished speaking....only seven of us....but then somebody said, "What can we do?" And each begins to work with the thing nearest at hand....a noble impulse, a spontaneous reaction, and within a year's time that little group of seven, touching a little bit here and a little bit there, have garnered together a thousand dollars, or thereabout....just a little here, and a little there!

Nothing, I say to you, absolutely nothing, no matter how small, is in-

significant in God's sight. He has a way of making a lot out of little, and He'd probably do it more often than seemingly occurs, if it weren't for our failure to offer to Him the thing nearest at hand.

Was it Edna St. Vincent Millay.....

"They may not need me, yet they might!
I'll let myself be just in sight;
A smile so small as mine may be
Precisely their necessity."

For shame upon you, you say you can't understand miracles? You say you can't see how they can happen? It's as simple as all this: you give to God the little that you have.

Every life was meant to be a partner with God in the working of miracles. Why don't you allow something exciting to happen! You could begin today!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

March 12, 1967

"SINNER'S PROFILE: WHO THROW STONES"

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There are those who give way to a wicked impulse in knowing a peculiar kind of delight in putting people on the defensive. The strength of a man's character, however, may lie in his willingness to be humiliated, and to engage in a kind of confrontation with those whom he knows even from the very beginning have closed their hearts and their minds against him. He knows full well that he will speak, but they will not hear.

Such is the prefatory remark as we come now to another in the series of sermons based on the general theme, "Sinner's Profile." Today's subject, "Those Who Throw Stones." And from the Gospel for the Day:

"And they took up stones to throw at him."

Stone-throwers that they were, give them credit for at least one thing: They did take Jesus Christ seriously.....they did make note of the fact that He was around. And they had listened earnestly enough to what He had to say, that they had made up their minds concerning Him, even if in the making up of their minds it meant total and complete rejection. Stone-throwers that they were.....give them credit for this at least: they did take Jesus seriously.

It's a far cry, perhaps, from our day, as characterized by a comment made by the President of our Church, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, as he was speaking to a group of church leaders. It was a kind of State-of-the-Church message....and someone stood up and asked this question, "Do you think the day will ever come that here in the United States the Church will be persecuted?"

Immediately he answered, "Persecuted? No. Ignored? - perhaps."

This is the sad state of affairs, that in all too many places by all too many people the church is treated with indifference. And for the moment I ask myself, which would you prefer, Jesus Christ, hostility....or to be ignored?

Studdert-Kennedy answered that question a number of years ago. He wrote a poem called "Indifference." It goes like this:

When Jesus came to Golgotha
they hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet,
and made a Calvary;
They crowned him with a crown of thorns, red
were his wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and
human flesh was cheap.
When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply
passed him by,
They never hurt a hair of him, they only let
him die;
For men had grown more tender,
And they would not give him pain,
They only just passed down the street,
And left him in the rain.
Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they
know not what they do,'
And still it rained the winter rain that
drenched him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets
without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall
and cried for Calvary."

Stone throwers that they were, at least they did take Jesus Christ seriously.

But this is not to condone their behaviour. The sin of stone-throwing is a vicious thing. And unfortunately for most of us, it creeps up in a very subtle way and before we know it we're reaching for stones.

To be as absolutely fair and honest as one can be with all shades of

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belief, let me say that it's not easy for some people to believe. The longer I am in the ministry, the more I recognize the truth of that statement. Not everyone has had the advantage that some of us have had, to be able to grow up in a home where there have been God-fearing parents, where the fact of God has been established around about us from the very beginning. Some people have never had that advantage.

Then some people have never had this kind of advantage, if I may put it for you this way, a temperament that's always disposed toward believing the good and the great and the gracious. Some people bring to life a kind of negative stance. It's just the way they're made. It isn't easy for all people to believe.

But this isn't the point. Jesus Christ was surrounded by people who were not believing Him. But He had to rail out against them.

There's something inside you that rebels against Jesus Christ being portrayed as He is in today's Gospel lesson. You want Him this gentle Jesus, you want Him this meek and this mild Jesus. You want the kind of Jesus who is always patting you on the back and wiping away the tear, the Jesus who says, "Come now, everything will be all right . . ." -- almost a Pollyanna kind of Jesus.

But the Gospel lesson deals with no such kind of Jesus. Allowing Himself to have this kind of confrontation, to people who bring to Him malignant hearts, He uses such language as strong as this: "I would be a liar, like you".....this is the stance of Jesus Christ, this is His mood, this is His temperament on this occasion, because He was dealing with a very diabolical thing, a group of people who had come to Him with their minds closed. They never intended to hear a single thing that He would say!

They tried to embarrass Him, they tried to put Him on the spot, they forced Him to say something. If He would have said, "I am the Messiah" - - they would have condemned Him on that score. If He would have said, "I am not the Messiah" - - they would have condemned Him on that score. So they came to Him.

It was one of those times when He did allow them to argue with Him. And how they must have gloried in their attempt to put Him on the defensive. But they never really hears His answers. How could they? They were reaching for stones even before He began to speak.

Because we take this as seriously as we do, because sin must always be taken seriously, we must ask ourselves the question: how was it possible that they got that way?.....and particularly that we should say they got that way. You know who they were, don't you? They were our kind of people, they were church people. They were the rulers in the synagogue...they came every time the church bells rang! They knew their Bible inside and out! They paraded their religion everywhere they went. Now these are the people who, in this moment of confrontation with Jesus Christ, call Him a demon, close their minds to God.

I think there's one reason why, and I think I'll suggest it to you at once. They were unwilling to believe that God could work in strange ways and through strange people. Or to put it for you in this manner: they were unwilling to believe that God could be at work in the present situation, unwilling to believe it.....didn't want to believe it.

These are the people who believed in the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. It's a very comfortable thing to believe in a

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God who acted a long, long time ago...and you read about a God of the past.but to have to be confronted with a God in the present moment, and this was a thing that they were unwilling to do. They made up their minds that they weren't going to have God deal with them now, especially in a character whom they could not fully appreciate. What credentials had a carpenter's son? So you see, their minds were closed -- unwilling, because they didn't want God to behave like that. He could demand far too much from them.

A cluster of us preachers happened to be together during this past week and one of the pastors gave me the saddest of all laments I've heard in a long time, because in a weary voice he said, "I've discovered how exhausting it is to be creative".....and what he meant by that -- to bring God into clear and sharp focus, in people's lives, where they live in the present day.

I suppose if pastors were to make confessions from their pulpits, they would have to admit that some of the most difficult people with whom to deal in their congregations are the parents of teenagers, because in a certain sense, of all the people who constitute membership in a church today, the most frustrated of all people are the parents of teenagers. Teenagers cause all kinds of problems, they bring all kinds of threats. To those of us who are older, they unsettle us in so many ways. And this unsettlement, you see, creeps out into their reaction toward other things. It was a wise bishop who told the pastors and the priests in his diocese, "You'll find that when you have cantankerous people in your parishes, it's because they're shadow-boxing with the issues of the church....but down deep it's because they have the unsettlement with something else, and then the Church becomes the whipping-boy."

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One of the problems we had not so long ago, to try to convince a parent that maybe it was perfectly all right to believe that a boy friend, not as desirable as she would like to have had him for her daughter, could gain something from a program being offered in this church! You see, there's always the risk that the bad could become good! And there are some people who after the sinner has come to his knees, they don't have anything else to talk about! But how they can glory in another man's sins!

These people had something to talk about, as long as they could brand Jesus Christ a demon. They didn't want to believe that He could be God. Take yourself to task, my friend, always take yourself to task - - this sin of stone-throwing is a very subtle kind of sin. We can pelt people to death by the words we say. We can cause them irreparable damage to their hearts by the thoughts that we think. Here was Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, Love incarnate.....and there were those who would kill Him, who would not believe Him, who denied themselves the blessings of believing just because they did not want to believe!

It may not be so much that a man is an unbeliever.....the acid test may be - - how much does he want to become a believer?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer, March 12

WE PRAISE and magnify Thy name, O God, for the blessings which have come to us through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord and Saviour, through the Holy Church, which nurtures us in the Faith, provides us Word and Sacrament by which we can remain steadfast to Thee.

O GOD, we thank Thee for this day. We look upon it as a gift from your hand. It is not by our deserving, but because Thou art gracious, Thou hast given us this, another chapter in time. Because it comes by your hand, enable us to use it wisely and well, that your purposes in our lives may be fulfilled.

HEAVENLY FATHER, we thank Thee for this church, for this congregation, for those who serve in any way by which it may remain faithful to Thee, and for your claim upon us, that we may witness and work and worship and do those things that are pleasing in your sight.

O GOD, we cannot think only of ourselves, but we pray for those whom we love wherever they may be, for those members of this congregation scattered half-a-world away, in difficult and lonely places, for those of our congregation in Vietnam.

O GOD, we pray now for those who are engaged in the ministry of peace, who are endeavoring to find ways and means by which this terrible, ugly business of war shall come to an end.

O GOD, we pray for them, and we pray for ourselves, that we in our own way may not sow seeds of hatred, which accumulate person upon person, nation upon nation, to bring about a divided world.

O GOD, now suit to each of us who is near the blessing he needs most, each of us a child of fear, each of us a child of frustration, each of us a child with certain failures that continue to bog him, but because Thou art a gracious God, give to us what only Thou canst give, that we may walk from this place as obedient children.

Forgive us our every sin, keep before us the hope of Heaven, and unto Thee shall be all honor and glory in a world that has no ending.

OUR FATHER.....

"SINNER'S PROFILE: WHO SHOUT HOSANNAS"

Today we come to the last in the Lenten series of sermons based upon the general theme "Sinner's Profile;" and the subtitle for this sermon, Sinner's Profile: Those Who Shout Hosanna. The text, from the Gospel for the Day, it's the 9th verse of the 21st chapter of Matthew:

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

In all likelihood you'd be just as happy if I didn't tell you what I'm going to tell you now, that that procession into Jerusalem didn't just happen. It was a planned procession, deliberately designed by Jesus Christ himself. And He himself was instrumental in checking out very carefully all the details. He gave them the blue-print, He told them about the arrangements, He told them how to make their contacts. It's a lot simpler to believe, of course, that it just happened....but I must tell you, it was a planned procession.

But make no mistake about it, whatever you do, don't cast Jesus Christ in the role of a manipulator of a mob - - even in the least reckless of your moments, don't characterize Him in that manner. He may have planned the procession deliberately so, but He did not manipulate the mob to the extent that they would shout as they did.

You know why He planned the procession, don't you?

There are those who tell us He wanted to make absolutely certain that

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the people understood why He came and who He was. He preached, He taught, He performed miracles, He gathered disciples. One day one of the disciples said, "Show us what God is like" -- and Jesus could say, "Well, look at me. If you want to see the Father, look at me."

...and there were those who had lurking in the recesses of their mind that this is the promised Messiah, so to dramatize the truth, He rode, now, as the Messiah into the great city.

He was simply doing, in a certain sense, what other deliverers before Him had done. This is not the first time that there was a triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But whatever else they may think of Him, let them recall that He did want to be thought of for what He was, for what He is -- the Messiah.....the deliverer. So He came.

But then you and I say to ourselves, surely He knew human nature. Why did He allow Himself to be so exposed to the mob that in return they would shout and declare words of praise, perchance, in His behalf. Didn't He know how fickle a mob could be? We know how fickle a mob can be. Even today, when we come and recognize the blessings of Palm Sunday, we're anticipating Good Friday -- we know that following the triumphal entry there was the denial, there was the arrest, and all of this coupled with the betrayal, and the bitter thing called crucifixion. We know all of this. Didn't Jesus Christ know that? Why did He allow Himself so great risk, to let the mob have its moment of praise and acclamation, knowing full well that Good Friday was bound to come?

Any reading of life, anyone with any degree of perception, knows how changeable a mob can be. Historians tell us that when Napoleon Bonaparte

achieved great victory over the masses, one of the lieutenants came and congratulated him. "Nonsense," says Napoleon, "Nonsense! This unthinking mob, with the slightest degree of provocation, could turn against me at any moment."

A friend of mine lived in Jordan for several years. Knowing those people as he did, he said it wasn't at all unusual for shop-keepers to have in their windows or on display the picture of the young King Husseinbut tucked away safely, within ready reach, was a photograph of President Nassar, in case they would need it momentarily.

So the mind could change. Didn't Jesus know this? As always, Jesus knows everything, and even as He allowed Himself to be exposed to the mob, a lesson here is being written for us that we do well to recognize, and the key to the lesson to which your attention is being drawn now is the slogan that they shouted, the word that they used. For I tell you this morning, even as Sunday after Sunday during this Lenten season I've come to this sacred desk to call your attention to the sinner's profile - - even now, I say, they also sin who shout slogans! For as they shouted their slogans they were sinners.

There's a subtle interpretation of that word Hosanna. It's not generally understood as an ascription of praise. There are some who tell us that's exactly what the word means, but there are also people, Biblical scholars, who tell us that that Hosanna means, "Save - - Deliver us now, God!" - - it also means, "God protect this deliverer!" If you read Psalm 118 you might discover a new meaning of this word, and here the full burden of this sermon is being let down right now. Understand that word

Hosanna in this way: a mob that's shouting for a deliverer, the mob that wants somebody to save -- immediately.....and at the same time, a mob that's crying out even to God Himself --

"God, you take care of our deliverer...

The Messiah has come! He is here! We don't want to run the risk of losing Him. This is what we've hoped for, this is what we've prayed for."

There are those who tell us that when they say "Hosanna in the highest" this is the cry that's being made to the outreach of Heaven itself, and the farther recesses of Heaven....

"Let everyone who is in the Highest take care of our deliverer.....God, the Messiah has come -- take care of him, God, you protect him, you save him."

....whenever you think of Palm Sunday, and you use that word Hosanna, see it in that light, allow yourself this interpretation of it...

....all right, the Messiah has come. This is what we want. But God, you protect Him for us.....God, you take care of Him.....the kind of cry in which man says to God, We want God, all right, but we want a kind of Do-It-Yourself God....

...that's how you read Palm Sunday, my friend, of course that's the way you read Palm Sunday. Because this is the mob that shouted its slogan.

And then you know what happened. These are the people who shout slogans and think they've had done with a day's work, just because they've shouted a slogan. They also sin who shout slogans. Now it may not be that their slogans are bad. In their case they used a perfectly good one, time-honored

at that, and even God-oriented. It was simply that they allowed themselves to believe that shouting was enough!

...we want a deliverer -- we need Him - now,

God, you take care of him....keep him safely for us.

Where was the mob.....when Judas betrayed a deliverer?

Where was the mob.....when Annas and Caiaphas contrived to
have done with him?

Where was the mob.....when a Roman governor said, "I'm going
to call him a king" -- and laughed and laughed and
laughed all the time he called him "King of the Jews"
-- where was the mob then?

This, you see, is what happens with people who shout slogans, and think that shouting is enough, never allowing themselves to believe that once the slogan has been shouted, once the petition has been signed, once the statement has been prepared, all of this calls for involvement, all of this means rolling up your sleeves, now, and getting into the thick of it.

For shame upon us, we want God to deliver us, we want God to do it all by Himself. It's a classic expression now -- everybody wants peace, but who wants the things that make for peace? Who is willing to work the deeds of peace?

Would you permit me, my friend, to put it for you in this manner.....
...we're the slogan-users. We're not the God-evaders, we're the God-shouters.
Why every Sunday we come together, and for an hour we're completely God-oriented -- all of us looking in the same direction, all of us with one voice, lifting something magnificent and triumphant to the very ears of God..

...all of us telling God how much we need Him, how much we want Him. Then once the Benediction is pronounced, we go our way, and all too often with never so much as a single thought as to what it is that needs to be done, by each one of us. It's never enough to say it.

This is the weakness of the Christian religion. It isn't that the Christian Church doesn't have enough people to sign on the dotted line, it isn't as though God never hears people tell Him how much they need Himthat's not the sad lack. It's that we permit ourselves to think that once we've said it, we've done a day's work.

It's because I love you that I say this. It's the easiest thing in the world to believe that once we've come here for a single hour on a Sunday morning, as though we've discharged our obligation to God for the week, as though saying it were enough. This is the sad lesson of Palm Sunday. The mob shouted - - -

"We've always wanted a Messiah like you,
and now you've come! God in Heaven, take care of Him
for us!"

The story doesn't change much. The world is going to hell. We want it to be saved. We believe that Jesus is the Messiah - - -

"God, you take care of Him for us!"

They also sin who shout Hosanna. Now it may not be that their slogans are bad. In this case it was a perfectly good one, time-honored, God-orientedit was simply that they allowed themselves to believe that shouting was enough.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE WRONG WAY TO BELIEF"

The sermon on this Easter Day bears the title, "The Wrong Way to Belief;" and the text is from the 20th chapter of John, it's the 14th verse:

"When she had said this, she turned herself around and saw Jesus, but she did not know that it was Jesus standing there."

It's in the motion picture Dr. Zhivago, isn't it, where we come to that most poignant of all scenes, it's near the end, of course. He pursued the light-of-his-heart and the love-of-his-soul, only to find that she's so elusive - - almost within reach, and then she escapes him forever. He collapses, he dies, never to regain a hoped-for exceedingly precious moment. But, almost.

Maybe this is the thing to be said of all of us. We are the almost people. Zhivago is the symbol for our day. We go pursuing, reaching, grasping....what we want most seems to elude us.

Today we think of that first Resurrection morning. Mary almost missed it. She of all people, who most deserved to see the risen Lord, came and kept her vigil faithfully, but there was Jesus Christ standing alongside of her but she did not know that it was He. What she wanted most seemed to be escaping her. This is a parable of belief for many people today. It isn't that they don't want to believe; it could be that we don't know the right way to go about believing. We could do the wrong thing. So much that

Mary did, out of a good and noble heart, was done in the wrong way.

That's why she almost missed the resurrected Christ.

To begin with, she came looking for the wrong thing. She was headed in the right direction, but when she got to the Resurrection Garden she expected to find the lifeless body of Jesus Christ. She expected that journey's end would be at a grave. When she got there, that's where she stopped.

This is the wrong way to belief, to look for the wrong thing...the thing that we expect might be at journey's end is not always the thing that God has in mind for us. And as we take the pilgrimage of the soul, so often we expect God to have waiting for us the thing of our designing, the thing of our expecting, and the thing for which we purpose. But Easter was never meant to be the story of a woman whose pilgrimage would end at a grave. Easter was never meant to be the story of a weeping woman, whose tears would be induced by the lifeless body taken from a cross and buried in a grave. This is not the story of Easter.

Yet had Mary gone only as far as she at first went, this would have been the story. This is the wrong way to belief, to go pursuing God, even expecting God to have waiting for you the thing that you plan to be of his designing. God always has something far more wonderful for us than what we might even expect...

...greater than a life now lifeless, having been

sacrificed triumphantly on Calvary's brow....

...even though we might settle for this, God will not. We might say it's enough, that greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life, even for sinners - - this is what we might go looking for. But God

says, I have something even greater than what you might imagine, than even you may desire. Mary's almost story is the story of the wrong way to belief.

Mary almost missed the Christ because her tears blinded her eyes. She couldn't see Him there, because tear-streaked as she was, she could only think of herself. This is in itself not a bad thing. Mary was keeping her rendezvous because she remembered that Jesus Christ had meant more to her than anyone else she had ever known. Call her by name, she was the scarlet woman. She was loved by many men, men who loved her for what she would mean to them. One day she met Jesus Christ, who loved her for what He could mean to her. That makes all the difference in the world. She could never forget this. And of all the characters in the New Testament, none produces a more poignant chapter than this rendezvous of Mary Magdalene....weeping.

Don't make light of her tears. Maybe this is the trouble with us. We're so sophisticated now that we don't even know how to cry any more. Hers was so great a devotion that it moved her to tears. Let me read for you these lines written by a poet which depict for us this wonderful relationship that existed between the Magdalen and the Christ -- no wonder she kept the vigil! -- no wonder it becomes an excellent expression of human love.....

"Magdalene at Michael's Gate,
Twirled at the pin;
On Joseph's thorn sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'
'Hast thou seen the wound?' said Michael,
'Knowest thou thy sin?'
'It is evening, evening,' sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Thou bringest no offerings?' said Michael,
'Nought save sin.'
'And the blackbird sang, 'She is sorry,
 sorry, sorry,
Let her in! Let her in!'
When he had sung himself to sleep
And night did begin,
One came at midnight and opened
 Michael's Gate,
And the Magdalen went in."

She had met Jesus Christ, and now He was taken away. All that she can do now is weep.

It was a crippling blow. But this is the wrong way to belief! - - to cry only because of what has happened to you. She was moved to tears because her world had tumbled in. Maybe if one wants to be cruel enough, it wasn't just because Jesus was killed.....it was because her Saviour was taken away. This is the wrong way to belief, to think of what has happened to us, to think of what we have been denied.

Many a crippled soul struggling through life never knows the full benefit of God's grace and God's love and truth, only because in his time of despair he thinks only of what has happened to him, and not the meaning that God is spelling out in and through the crippling blow. Mary, beautiful as your devotion is, this is the wrong way to belief, simply to cry.

It was Mary's wrong way to belief because as she stood there she kept looking at the grave. Up to this point she kept looking back, and as she looked into the grave all that she could think about was that evil had had its day....men had done their worst. This is the wrong way to belief, I tell you, when you concentrate upon the evil that comes through men's hearts, the evil that's done by men's hands. This is the wrong way to be-

lief, to concentrate upon the evil that has been done. This is why I sometimes have second thoughts when I look up at the crucifix that I have hanging above my door in my office, that I have hanging in my study at the Parsonage.....I have second thoughts about it, because there, you see, is the representation of someone who was killed. And as long as I look at that limp form hanging upon the cross I not only think of God's Son who was sacrificed, but I also think of the apparent victory of evil. This is why we have burnished for you an empty cross, because the empty cross reminds us that after evil has done its worst, God still has something to say and do. Mary's path was the wrong way to belief as long as she kept looking back into an empty grave.

Mary's path was the wrong way to belief because when she looked at the man standing alongside of her she didn't know it was Jesus, for the simple reason that she expected to find Him just as she had always seen....
...and listen now, my friend, this may startle you a bit, but with God things never are as once they were. Life is always changing - - people change - - situations change. And God must always meet us in the new situation, God must always meet us even in the unsettlement of life, in its apparent insecurity.

This, too, must be said, that Mary's path was the wrong way to belief because, standing there, she saw a man and she did not see in that man the face of Jesus Christ. But this, too, is a symbol for each of us - - we'd much prefer to go through life always keeping things as once they were, even in the matter of belief, in the matter of faith, even in the matter of religious experience. It's easier to believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob, even, or to think of Jesus Christ in Galilee and Judea. When Mary stood there, undoubtedly she kept thinking about Jesus Christ as she knew Him in Judea.

But Judea is over. It's a new situation, it's a new day, and this is a new Christ. If resurrection means anything, it means a new Christ. This is our difficulty in our believing -- it's easy to believe in a God of the Bible, it's easy to believe in the Christ of a carpenter's shop. But in the Christ who meets us in the present moment -- -- this may take a bit of doing!

I never get tired of telling you this...you can afford to hear it again.....the devout Greek Orthodox who offered prayer before his icon, and the smoke from the incense goes heavenward as he stands there, or kneels, and he prays, "Lord, reveal Thy face to me....Lord, reveal Thy face to me." And undoubtedly all the time he offers the prayer to be made aware of the face of Jesus Christ, he imagines that He is going to look as He always looked once upon a time in Galilee and Judea.

...and as he prays there's a parade of faces....

...the diseased and the well....

...the happy and the sad....

....the persecuted...the oppressed....the affluent...

.....the young and the old....

.....the redeemed and the unredeemed.....there they are.

...and then he says to himself, "Then I saw His face, like no man's face, yet like every man's face."

This was part of Mary's trouble, she didn't allow herself to believe

that in this new moment Jesus Christ's appearance would be new, and He would come to her in a living situation. Maybe Dietrich Bonhoeffer would say to us, look for Jesus Christ in the face of him who is nearest to you. Mary's path was the wrong way to belief because she failed to recognize that Jesus Christ, the Resurrected One, could be in the person nearest to her.

Well, if this is the wrong way to belief, what is the right way? Well that 20th chapter of John spells that out too. The Bible doesn't always go on talking about wrong ways. It's the Bible that also declares for us the right and proper way. Mary had her precious moment of the awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ only as she turned and was made quiet, and then not in what she said, not in what she thought, but in what was revealed to her. This is how faith comes to us, when God speaks the word, when God reveals Himself.

As I put my finger on the spiritual pulsebeat of our day, I say this is our trouble - - we are the intellectual ones, we are the philosophical ones, we are the sophisticates.....and sophistication and intellect and philosophy can take us only so far on the path to faith, and then man's human effort must stop. And in that moment perhaps, when we stop and are quiet, we may hear God speak to us. It's this given-ness of God, it's this self-revelation of Christ, when faith has its own redeeming moment.

"And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.
Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. . . "

...and get ready now! - - this is the supreme moment - -

"Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned
herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni;
which is to say, Master."

It all happened when she quit looking and allowed herself to be found
by God.....when she quit talking and allowed herself to hear the
voice of the resurrected Christ.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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April 2, 1967

"SERVANT"

It was last September when the sermon series for this year, for the most part, to be preached from this pulpit from then until June was introduced. It's a series that deals with a consideration of the names and titles given to the early Christians, hopefully that in our understanding of these names we might gain a new appreciation for the meaning of Christian commitment. For a name is important, a name is indicative. The sermon today bears the title, "Servant"; and the text, the 26th verse of the 20th chapter of Matthew:

"But it shall not be so among you: but
whosoever will be great among you,
let him be a servant."

The only man I know in Silver Spring who lives a hermitlike existence is a man, they tell me, who once upon a time had been in personnel. And so I say to myself, could it be that he became fed up with people, that he reached the point where he could no longer endure them? So he separated himself from them.

I say to you from a purely human point of view, I marvel that our Blessed Lord stood, that is, put up with the disciples. What annoyance they must have caused Him. How grieved and irritated He must have been so frequently by their lack of progress in the school of discipleship. He came to invest Himself in them. Whenever He went anywhere He told them where He was going, what was going to happen and why it would happen, and what would be the meaning of it all.

If He preached a sermon, chances are that after He had finished preaching

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the sermon He turned around and looked at the disciple band, and they still had the look of puzzlement on their faces. So what would He do? He'd begin all over again, and tell them exactly what He had said, and why He had said it. If He performed a miracle, after He performed the miracle then He'd have to explain to them why this display of power. If He didn't perform a miracle, He'd make it a point to tell them why He didn't perform a miracle. This went on for three years.

From a purely human point of view, we'd have reason to believe that after three years something would have caught on at least, and they would have some basic appreciation for all that He was and all He was trying to tell them, because He was always talking about the Kingdom. Well, it was very near the end of His relationship with them. In fact, they only had about one lesson or two yet to go, when lo and behold, somebody came and said, "Jesus, when you get into the Kingdom, how about letting James and John have these positions of preferment."

I don't know whether I would like to have been there to have seen the look on the face of Jesus Christ at that point. I think it must have been something like this.....'What! Do you mean to tell me that you come and ask a question like that now! Do you mean to tell me that you still don't know what the Kingdom is about! Don't you know that I don't talk about positions of preferment in the Kingdom. I have been talking about service, I have been talking about humility, I have been talking about losing your life.....and now, after three years, from even within the inner circle, two of you come and want these positions of preferment! Don't you realize that if you are to get something like this, then you're edging somebody else out! Don't you know

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that if you desire such great prominence, you'll be deliberately asking for something over and above these other folk. You want them to be beneath you? We don't talk this way in the Kingdom, we don't think this way in the Kingdom."

....then He said, "He who would be great among you, let him be your servant."

Well, that's why we come to this word servant now. It's another name or title given to the early Christians. Some of the names were given to the disciples, some they chose for themselves. Occasionally it was a name that Jesus chose for them. This was one of those names that Jesus deliberately chose.

Now the Hebrews were great at this sort of thing. They never just casually gave a name to a child. They chose the name very carefully, hoping that in the choice of the name they would set before the youngster all the days of his years a characteristic or a personality trait that he might live up to. Names are important. Names describe a role, they identify. So Jesus said to His followers, "You shall be servants."

Word study is always fascinating if you take it seriously. This word servant, being translated from the original Greek, really means a slave. Now that's a shock to your system, isn't it? - - to think that Jesus Christ would use such a word for His followers! - - that they were to be the enslaved ones! At any rate, it doesn't appeal to us. We want to throw off any kind of restraint, we're the ones who question any kind of authority. If there's one word that describes our generation, that is, our age, it's rebellion....groups here and groups there questioning all kinds of authority.

But Jesus Christ was talking to anybody who wanted to be a follower of His. He said, Reckon with this word servant, and let's take the word seriously.....and when you and I begin to take it seriously we discover that it really means a slave.

All right now, what does it mean to be a slave? Originally a slave was someone who belonged to somebody else, for whom a price had been paid, redeemed, a ransom had been offered. It's as simple as that. Now, that's not a new notion in the Christian religion. We do use such words as these in the Christian Faith, or we ought to:

"Ye have been bought with a price - - "

"He gave his life a ransom - - "

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man

lay down his life - - - "

Whenever any man has had a Christian experience he knows that he's been died for, that Jesus Christ has given His life for him.

Now when a man was a slave, he knew that he had been bought, purchased, saved from one situation to another. I'm a firm believer that it's a salutary thing to have a skirt with death. Not until a man finds that life could be taken away from him might he be able to appreciate its real meaning. I know whereof I speak. Once I almost drowned. I think my life has taken on a different dimension from that moment on - - to know that there was a particular time in my life when there wasn't a single thing that I could do for myself, and if I was to be saved, it would be because there was somebody else who had resources and capabilities other than my own.

I think it's a salutary thing for a man to go through life knowing that he owes his life to somebody else. It puts an entirely different stamp on your life when you know that somebody has done something for you, that has

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spelled out the difference between life and death. I'm not talking simply of physical death, I'm talking now of spiritual death. When a man knows that he has been lost in sin, then a Saviour comes to redeem him, to pay the price, from that moment on how can he do anything else but say, "What can I do for you?" -- and to the last day that he may live he'll go on trying to repay. This is what a Christian is meant to be, one who recognizes that he has been bought, that a price has been paid for his salvation.

I tell you with all the ardor of my soul, this is the trouble with contemporary Christianity -- we just don't think in these terms any more, that we are people who have been redeemed. Well, maybe we can't talk that way because we don't know that we have been lost, and if Jesus Christ means anything at all in God's plan for us, He is to be Saviour. And a saviour is one who saves someone from something -- and let me finish the sentence -- to something else!....and for a holy purpose. So Jesus Christ says, "You shall be slaves." A slave is one who has been redeemed.

A slave is one who, when it was all said and done, made no choices. His life was not his own, his choices were made by somebody else. Would you allow me to reduce it to something as simple as this: in essence, this is what the Christian religion is all about. We have a Lord and we have a Master, and we are His servants, and as His servant, then He makes the choices, He tells us what to do.

You know by this time that I still carry away a measure of appreciation for some of the old Gospel hymns. Oh, with a little bit of learning, I, too, can say now that the music isn't very good....but I shall not discard them completely, because there was a message that I'm not so sure that I'm hear-

ing anywhere else quite as pointedly, as when you get a hymn that speaks like this:

"I'll go where you want me to go, Dear Lord, - - "

"I'll do what you want me to do, Dear Lord - - "

"I'll say what you want me to say, Dear Lord - - "

"I'll be what you want me to be, Dear Lord - - - - "

If discipleship means anything at all, it means allowing Jesus Christ to take over a man's life, and to make decisions for us.

But down deep inside of us we rebel against this sort of thing. Even when we pray, we're the ones who dictate to God, we're the ones who tell Him that we want to be made better, and under what terms we want to be made better. We're the ones who tell Him where we're going to go and what we're going to do and under what terms we're going to do it. And this is just the reversal of what basic Christian commitment was meant to be. That word servant - - it really means slave, and a slave is one who allowed the master to make the choices for him, because he had no other choice.

That word servant also, when you see it in the connotation of being slave, means that a slave was subject to call at all times. Once a man was a slave his life was not his own, that is, he had no off-duty hours. He could never think of a time when he could do simply what he wanted to do, with utter and complete disregard of his master. That means, if you and I are to take the Christian religion seriously, there is no time when we can think of ourselves....."God, it's my day off." It also means that there is no division between sacred and secular. It means at any time, anywhere, as a follower of Jesus Christ, I am in duty bound to do what He wants done.

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You see, it's a long time since we've done this kind of thinking. I wonder what would happen if every time a man became a member of the Christian church he was asked to sit down for four hours and ascertain the meaning of such words: disciple.....servant.....slave of Jesus Christ. A weakness in contemporary Christianity that makes it as anemic as it is, is that we fail to appreciate and to fully understand the meaning of such words as fol-lower, servant, slave.

Honestly now, it's really quite simple. If you want a thrilling experience, awaken each morning, and then say to God....

"Well, God, it's another day. I'm reporting
for duty. What do you want done?"

It could be a thrilling thing. I share this with you for what it may be worth, out of my own life and experience.

There are times when day is done, when I'm able to catalog for Christ some of the most thrilling things that have ever happened, and I never had the slightest notion that they were going to occur. But I do remember that it happened to be one of those days when I would, with a measure of confidence, say.....

"Your way, today, God.....Your way."

And it's always been a thrilling thing. It's not easy, but it's thrilling.

May I also add this, that it really doesn't require a great deal of structuring. Sometimes I think my ideal of a parish would be where the congregation came together only on Sundays, and they sang God's praise, and they offered their prayers as a people, and they listened to the proclamation of the Gospel, they received the assurance of the forgiveness of their every

sin.....and then they were turned loose, and went out into the world for another week -- nobody structuring anything for them, but each individual Christian under commitment to serve Jesus Christ, no matter where he went, and regardless of the situation in which he found himself.

As I visit in the parish I'm always amazed to discover the things that are happening, but up until that point I'd had no idea, and you have no idea, that they're happening, and gloriously so, in the lives of those who are saying.....

"Reporting for duty today, Christ --
what's your pleasure?"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 9, 1967

"NEW CREATION"

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Before too long the month of June will have run its course and by that time we will conclude the series of sermons introduced last September dealing with the names and titles given to the early Christians. Our intention is deliberate, for in our day and age we need to discover all over again just what it means to be a Christian. Hopefully this series of studies introduces us to the descriptives given to those who carried the name of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes the names are bestowed by Christ himself. Sometimes, as in the case of the study for today, it was given by the chief evangelist, a name chosen by the Apostle Paul....."New Creation." For whenever he thought of a follower of Jesus Christ, he allowed himself to believe that what had happened in his life is the kind of thing that ought to happen in everybody's life, once he has been encountered by God-in-Christ. The text for today's sermon, the 17th verse of the 5th chapter of his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul's words:

"If any man be in Christ he is a new
creation: old things are passed away,
all things become new."

I much prefer J. B. Phillips' translation:

"If any man be in Christ he becomes
a new person altogether."

We're talking a great deal in the Church these days of renewal. In fact, it's the key word, now, in the MANIFESTO that we're studying....

...we've had a number of different meetings, excellent response....I've been thrilled by the presentation that staff members have been making as they serve as resource leaders.....

...and the key word in every study - - renewal - - renewal - - renewal.

And this is good. But each time I pick up the study book document, each time I attend a session in which we're studying this broad subject, I say to myself, but renewal of what? We could miss the mark.

Last week I went back to the church from which I had come when I came to you eleven years ago. The Pastor of the congregation was thrilled, showing me around, because they've completely renewed the church structure. Oh, years ago it was a little bit of this and a little bit of that, perhaps '57 different varieties' of architectural design...I think even the roof had six or seven different directions in which the roof was going. For years they had talked about the possibility of doing something, when after years of study they spent, now, between \$300,000 and \$400,00, just to renew the structure.

I marvel at what was accomplished. The one word that went bobbing back and forth upon the horizon of my mind.....transformation!....transformation! I could hardly believe that I was in the same place. Now I suppose to this day when people of Messiah's Church talk about renewal, their first thought is of a renewed structure.

It could be that here in Saint Luke Church, when we talk about renewal of the church, and we study the document of the MANIFESTO, we're inclined to first think of renewed forms - - how can the church today in some new fashion proclaim the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Frankly, I'm getting a

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little bit tired of going to meetings, where we do nothing but explore ways and means by which to do things today. I'm inclined to think that we're not spending enough time in a consideration of the message that we're going to proclaim through the renewed form....the message that we want to make known in the new structure, that perhaps we might be able to devise.

Oh, I wouldn't for one single minute minimize the importance of trying to make the timeless message relevant to our day and the best possible way by which to make contact. But what good is it, if in concentratint perhaps upon the need of the inner city, we do not send a renewed man. Wasn't it Edwin Markham who said, "Why build these cities glorious, if man un-built goes? In vain we build the work unless the worker also grows." It's the easiest thing in the world to sit down in a meeting and talk about a renewed order, renewed church, a renewed society. But I make bold to suggest to you that we recognize the need to talk about a renewed man.

New men make a new society. If a church is to be renewed, it's going to be renewed by renewed people. That's why a consideration of this text is every bit as important as I'm constrained to believe that it is. Says the Apostle Paul....."If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation - - - he becomes a new person altogether." And this is what you and I must talk about right now.

It's the marvel of Christianity that people can be transformed, that people can be renewed. The message of Christianity is the message of a miracle! - - - the miracle of a transformed life! This is what the New Testament is all about! It's God-come-to-us-in-Christ, touching people with a transforming power. Isn't it time that we got back to what is basic in the Christian reli-

gion? Let's quit seeing it for less than it really is. It's something more than a system of morals, a way of thinking. It's encounter with God-come-to-us-in-Christ, and the net result is life-changing power.

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You're not fair with yourself, my friend, when you read the New Testament and when you talk about the miracles, you talk about water being changed into wine, you talk about a man being able to walk upon the water, you talk about a man named Lazarus who is brought back from physical death into physical life....you're wrong when you talk about miracles and you think only of a boy's lunch being multiplied from loaves and fishes to a sumptuous fare.

If you want to talk about the miracles in the New Testament, you talk about the Big Fisherman, Peter.....you talk about the Magdalen.....you talk about Zacchaeus.....you talk about this seemingly endless chain of people who had an encounter with Jesus Christ, and once they met Christ, their lives could never again be the same! If God-come-to-us-in-Christ means anything at all, it means life-changing, transforming power.

And I'd allow the full thrust of this sermon to rest for the moment upon a weakness that some of us have, using words that do not become the vocabulary of the Christian, when you and I say, but human nature can't be changed. The message of God-come-to-us-in-Christ is simply that human nature can be changed. There's a crippling influence at work in your life and in my life when we brand people, when we label them, and we set an image -- an encounter maybe we've had with them several years ago, as we've observed them, and then we neatly label them in our mind, and we walk away and say, "But they can't be changed, they can't be changed." To talk like that is to spell a lie to what God came to do in Jesus Christ.

For the fascinating and the thrilling thing of the New Testament is the account of one person after another whose lives have been renewed -- changed -- transformed. Let me give you three case studies, each one in a different era.

Once there was a man named Saul. If he had his way, he'd give himself to devising instruments of torture! No cruelty seemed vicious enough to get rid of the Christians. He even had official status, he could kill them, eradicate them.....

...and then one day he had an encounter with Jesus Christ. And after that encounter his whole life was transformed. Now he wanted to love these Christians, now he wanted to be a friend to them and have them be friends to him. Where once his heart was filled with hate, now it's filled with love! And he gives for all mankind to the end of time that magnificent hymn of love -- you recognize it---Corinthians, the 13th chapter of his First Letter, ending by saying: "And now abides faith, hope, love, these three - - - the greatest of these is love." Where once he was a robber of the fold, now he wants to be a shepherd. It's a miracle, I tell you, and it happened.

Once there was a man, the son of a very wealthy merchant....(we're moving, now, to Italy). His only desire is to satisfy his own instincts for pleasure. You name it -- he'd do it. They tell us, and I'm not so sure it's an exaggeration, that for his own pleasure he spent enough money in one night to maintain a score of families for a month. They tell us he was a vain person.....

.....then one day -- he had an encounter with God-in-

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Christ. And now we refer to him as Saint Francis of Assisi. He turned his back upon his father's possessions. The only things that he really possessed were the things that he could wear on his back and the sandals that he put on his feet. And he got down to just one change of garment, then only one cloak.....and he met a beggar without a cloak. From his own shoulders he gave his own cloak and walked around for a while in a loincloth and sandals. He who once despised people now walks the street, sees a diseased man, a leper, embraces him! -- kisses him!.....a miracle! - - - the life-changing force of Jesus Christ at work in a man's life.

Turn the pages of history. Come now to the British Isles. John Wesley... confirmed, baptized in the Faith, that's what he was. He called himself a believer in Christ. Yet he really didn't see too much difference in his life as over against the non-believer. He came to our shores, he went down to Georgia. He wanted to evangelize the Indians. Still lacking something....

....well, he tells us, was it May 25 in the year 1735 at a quarter to nine in the evening, he heard an unlettered man make some observations upon Luther's Commentary to the Romans in Aldersgate Street Mission in London, and then "I felt my heart strangely warmed"....and from that time on his whole life was transformed, and Lecky, the historian, says that John Wesley did more than any other man in his lifetime to transform the face of England.

But you say to me, and you say it very quickly, but these are extraordinary people, and these were unusual instances.

Maybe yours might not be as dramatic as all this, but there are mil-

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lions of people, who even though they may not be as articulate as others, are witness to the fact that a life-changing force has been at work in their life and their only name for it is Jesus Christ. I shan't do it, but I'm almost tempted to do it....leave the pulpit, walk down the aisle of Saint Luke Church. I could stop here and I could stop there, not as frequently as I should like, and every now and then I could look one of you straight in the eye and I could say, "Come now, stand up -- look the rest of the people straight in the eye -- tell them...tell them what's happened in your life since Jesus Christ took over....tell them that you know the meaning of transformation." The thrill of any pastor who wants to be a shepherd to the souls of his people lies in this very thing, where the transforming power of Christ is at work.

"If any man be in Christ, he becomes a new person" ...how can you be sure this is the thing at work in your life? I'm going to suggest two things for you that are twin virtues. They cannot help but become an expression in your life once Jesus Christ takes over. The twin virtues are gratitude and love.

A new creation is the result of God at work in your life. No man can save himself! Only God can do this! We can refuse to let God do it, but when it is done, it's God's work! When a person knows that this has happened in his life, to the day that he dies he can't help but say, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

The other virtue....it's called love. God is love. Christ is love incarnate. And when Christ comes into a man's heart, then He takes over. This is why a man becomes a new creation, a new creature. The old man, the old Adam, the natural man, is self-centered, and until Christ is fully in

control of your life and my life, the decisions that we make are always self-centered decisions. We react to things and to people according to the way it's going to affect us and us only. But when Christ takes over, we're ruled by love!

My friend Oscar Carlson used to say that to love someone is to affirm the meaning of that person's life. And when you affirm the meaning of a person's life you always open the door to unbounded possibilities! It's amazing what some people can become once they know that they're being loved. That's why some of us have made what seems like a little bit of progress along the way, because of the one thing that we're certain in life is that somewhere there are those who love us, and this becomes the encouragement and the inspiration to stay on the way.

But for some people this is the most difficult thing in the world, to love. For when you love, you take the initiative. Are you ready for this -- so often you and I think in our relationship with people, well I'll forgive, all right, but first they've got to repent....I'll forgive, alright, but first they've got to give some indication of change. Now let me tell you -- that isn't the way Christ treats us! Christ forgives us in order that we might repent. Christ forgives us that His forgiveness might serve as the encouragement our lives can be transformed.

When I think of that congregation in South Williamsport, and its renewal, I have to admit, knowing those people as I do and loving them as I have, it wasn't easy for them to see their church structure renewed. It meant getting rid of some things that some of them had cherished through the years, certain fixtures on the wall that now went on a rubbish heap -- of no value whatso-

ever in the renewed church. Giving birth to something is never an easy thing. Physical birth is not an easy thing, as any mother will admit. The birth of something new spiritually is even far more difficult -- to get rid of some of the old, previously conceived notions, the labels that we've clung to tenaciously, for a decade and more....to get rid of them, and then to make place for the new, may not be easy.

My friend, let me ask you this question: if you're a man in Christ, what's new about you?....or could you be the same old Christian, using the label Christian, now, that you don't want to give up.....

....but could you be the same old person that you were ten years ago? Is there anything new about you now, in Christ?

I'll give you two sure measuring rods:

....when you pray, do you find yourself with a

heart that swells up with gratitude? is

most of your praying a thank-you to God?

The other measuring rod:

....when you think of people, is your first reaction,

how can I love this person?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ALIENS AND EXILES"

The sermon series continues today dealing with the names and titles given to the early Christians. And from the Epistle assigned for this Third Sunday after Easter, I Peter, the 2nd chapter, the 11th verse:

"I beseech you as pilgrims and strangers - "

or as the translation has it...

" . . as aliens and exiles - - "

A member of this congregation several years ago, since removed to a distant city, once told me about her family history. Included in her family was her older sister who had embraced Roman Catholicism. So great was her fervor for the Faith that she decided to enter a convent, and she chose the Order of the Carmelite nuns. I think I am correct when I tell you that as a Carmelite nun, one takes the vow of silence, or at least, does not speak generally in the course of the day. This, of course, is an indication of withdrawal.

We speak a great deal about the cloistered life, when one becomes a monk, when one becomes a sister, to live in a monastery or to live in a convent. This is not something unusual in the Christian religion. It's been going on throughout all history, ever since the dawn of the Christian Church, that there should be people who would say to themselves, we can serve our Lord better by leading a life of meditation and contemplation, even though it means withdrawal.

One, as he reads the pages of the New Testament, becomes acquainted with

a man by the name of John the Baptizer. He was a wilderness dweller, and decided for himself that he could serve his Lord better by leading a life of contemplation and meditation, at least for a certain period in his life.

This is not something peculiar to the Christian religion. Traveling in India, my friend would point out to me, every now and then, a kind of enclosure that had been built by a man to make himself secure against the world, and there he lived in a kind of self-imposed confinement. As an act of faith he honestly believed that there would be those who would care for his physical needs. He would not talk with them when they came and brought him morself of food. But there he was, withdrawn from the world, as though he could serve a Maker-of-all-things in a better way by such a retreat.

The only man I know living in Silver Spring who lives a hermitlike existence is a man, they tell me, who once upon a time dealt in personnel....
...which might be indicative of something that you and I feel, that if we were to choose a way of life, we have our moments when we'd like to be hermitlike - - fed up with the world, fed up with people.

There have always been those who have taken this stance. Somewhere in our understanding of the Christian religion we may erroneously for a time believe that the world is so evil that we ought not to have anything to do with it whatsoever. Well, what does one do when he contemplates the world as something evil? How can he have a healthy balance?

Well perhaps we must regard the truth that it's never been intended that Christians should withdraw from the world. We're gaining quite an understanding of this fundamental concept in the practice of our religion as such choice

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words in our current vocabulary as "involvement," "identification," "relevance" indicate. But on the other hand we must also remember that we dare not become too attached to this world. The same Christ who said to His disciples "Go into the world" also said something about not being of the world. A healthy understanding of the practice of the Christian religion permits one to believe that he's meant to be a citizen of two worlds, a part of two kingdoms. Sir Thomas Brown says that of all the created things, man stands alone as the great amphibian, one who was meant to be part of two worlds, and his problem of problems is, how to handle this, how to discover for himself the proper relationship of two worlds at one time...an echo, of course, of what our Blessed Lord said - - "in the world, but not of the world." You may remember His great high priestly prayer, you may remember when He was praying for us -- not only for His disciples but for those who would come to believe through them, when Jesus had you and me in mind... He prayed something about "while they would be in the world, they would not be of it."

The great Apostle, the Big Fisherman, that man named Peter, when he set about to write a letter to certain Christians, he spelled this thing out rather clearly and boldly - - he gave them a title. He said, "You shall be, then, in the world as aliens and exiles.....you shall be, then, in the world as strangers and sojourners and pilgrims. You are in the world, but not of it. You were not meant to escape it, you were not meant to withdraw from it.

I'm quite certain that none of us can fully appreciate the impact of these words when they heard them for the first time, because in all likeli-

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hood there wasn't a single Christian among them who did not fervently pray that somehow there could be a magic button that he would touch, that would either redeem the world completely, or enable them to escape it. For the world in which they lived was not a very friendly world. It was absolutely hostile to the cause of Jesus Christ. Let me remind you of a couple of historical factors, that you might better appreciate the way the Apostle Peter says to Christians, "I beg you to live as strangers and pilgrims, aliens and exiles and sojourners."

This was the time of Nero, as diabolical a character as ever lived. Historians who are charitable say that he was demented, and settle the case at that point. Remember how we say he "fiddled while Rome burned." He thoroughly enjoyed himself while the Imperial City was going up into flames. Historians tell us that he hated slums, he hated anything that was deteriorating. He himself issued the orders that the city should be up in flames. There are those who tell us that he also issued the order that if anybody was seen putting out the fire, they were to be punished, and the fire itself re-kindled.

Word got around that Nero was responsible for the burning of the city, and this was more than he could take. So he had to have a scapegoat....and he said, "The Christians! - - they started it! The Christians! - - they're to blame!" And there were those who believed this, because Christians have always been a strange group in the world. They had all kinds of unfortunate reports being circulated about Christians....how they gathered together behind closed doors....how they sacrificed the body and blood of Jesus Christ -- they drank the blood, ate the flesh!they even called them cannibals.

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People outside the faith, you see, who heard, who heard about this sort of thing.....and then because Christians elevated the place of women, they began to tell terrible tales, especially when the word got out that there was always the kiss of peace, and how they embraced one another, in love. Well, it was very easy to make much of this, you see, and to blame the Christians.

And then Nero was among those who said that the Christian religion would be declared illegal, which meant if a man was found practicing the Christian religion he could be imprisoned, he could be punished.....and a man dealt with favorably could bring such people to trial.

Just to show you how terrible the day was in which these Christians lived, Nero issued such orders as these, that if a man would not give up his Christian religion, he'd be punished, he'd be tormented, persecuted. You want to hear something terribly diabolical? - - he'd take Christians and dress them up in the skins of wild animals, and then he'd throw them into the arena, and he'd issue the order that the lions should be released.....and then he laughed and laughed and laughed as the lions tore these Christians into bits, into shreds.

Can you stand another chapter?.....he'd take these Christians, dip their bodies in oil, then tie them to a stake and put the stake in the ground. And then when daylight had run its course and darkness had come, the bodies of these Christians drenched in oil would be ignited, and by the light of their burning the garden of the Emperor was illuminated by night.

That is the kind of world in which these Christians lived.....and there was no magic button that they could press to take them out of it. They were

continually being reminded of their Lord and their Master who said something about being "in the world but not of it."

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Well Peter, bless his soul, with that great big pastor's heart of his, wrote them a letter, and he said, "Beloved, I beseech you, as aliens and exiles, as strangers and pilgrims, as sojourners -- that's what you are..... you're just passing through this world, anyway. You were never meant to stay here. You have an eternal destiny, a destination. In the meantime, while you're traveling, you acquit yourself in the manner and conduct that becomes the Christian." And he spelled it out in this Epistle lesson for the day.

It's not very pleasant reading. Peter tells us some things here that I don't like to hear. I wish he would have said something else. Remember what he said about "If you have to suffer because you've done something wrong, that is one thing; but when you have to suffer because you've done something right in the sight of God, God's going to pat you on the back -- God's going to say, 'That's right.'" Who wants to suffer because he's being good? It's bad enough to suffer because you've done evil. Well, says the Apostle Peter, you can develop for yourself this manner of living if you'll only remember that you're never meant for this world and for this world alone. You're here as an exile -- that means you're a temporary resident, that means your true fatherland is somewhere else. You're here as a sojourner, as a pilgrim..... ...that means you have a goal beyond this world.

This, I submit to you, is the lamentable thing about our life today. We're earth-bound creatures. We have forgotten the vertical, the eternal dimension. You and I have only to examine our own lives to discover how much of our energy and our concern is given to eking out an existence as

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though we were going to stay here forever! It's so seldom, you see, that we keep reminding ourselves that there is something beyond this world. And this is man's great problem - - to discover how to live on this earth as a citizen of heaven. And yet, with all the ardor of my soul I tell you, there will never be any meaning to our existence on earth until we see ourselves in this vertical relationship, that we treat one another on the basis of God's relationship to us. But we keep saying to ourselves, earth-bound creatures that we are, that we've got to live on earth as creatures of this world and only as these creatures of this world.

Some twenty miles from Agra where the Taj Mahal is located in India, there is one of the largest of all the mosques in all India, perhaps one of the largest in the world. As you near it you're impressed by the fact that here is a huge gate through which you enter into the courtyard of the mosque. It's 120 feet wide, 120 feet high, and there on the right hand, written in Arabic, is a little-known saying of Jesus Christ. It says something like this.....This world is like a bridge. We are meant to pass over it, never to build our houses upon it. And we are always getting into trouble, and life is always losing its real meaning, whenever we're inclined to settle down here, as though this was the only thing that God had in mind for us.

Is it Kierkegaard who gives us the illustration of the bird that was meant to fly and to soar, and then one day it settled down in the barnyard, and there it stayed and never again thought of soaring, simply allowing itself to be content and satisfied by the things that surrounded it in its narrow enclosure. Then one day, as Kierkegaard would have it, it had a noble impulse to fly away, but could not. It had become so conditioned to,

shall I say, its horizontal existence.

Tolstoy has a powerful story about a young Russian farmer who fell heir to an estate of his father's. It didn't amount to very much. And as he stood by his father's grave, a stranger appears on the scene, a stranger with some semblance of authority and power. And the stranger says to the young Russian farmer, "You want more land! - I can tell it by looking at you. I'll tell you what I will do, I will give you as much land as you can cover in the course of the day. It will be yours. You begin where you are now standing, at the edge of your father's grave, and then by sundown, this is the spot to which you must return."

Fired on by ambition, thinking of the things now that he could possess on this earth, he tears away, throws off his cloak, doesn't so much as embrace his wife and his children, gives them no heed whatsoever, and tears away like mad.....

....as he runs he says to himself, "I'll settle for six square miles." Then he blocks off a square, and by noontime it occurred to him that it could be possible to walk sixty miles -- a fifteen-mile square. A stranger by the way offers him a drink by a wayside well...he brushes it by. Someone offers him a morsel of food...he will not eat. He's driven by this passion to claim as much as he can in this world.

In the distance he can see the sun nearing the horizon. He's fired on like a crazed man -- he must reach the point where he'll receive what's been promised. With the last ounce of energy and as the sun completely sets, he reaches the point where the stranger stands at the father's grave.....only to collapse, fatally. There lies a dead man. And the stranger says, "I keep my promise! I promised him as much ground as a man could cover, and there you have it -- six feet long, two feet wide."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HEIRS"

Little perhaps did we realize, when last September we began this series that deals with the names and titles given to the early Christians, that there would be so great variety and so interesting a study as surely it's proving itself to be. To be included in our catalog, the title "Heirs"; and the text, from Paul's Letter to the Romans, it's his 8th chapter, it should be both the 16th and the 17th verses:

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with
our spirit, that we are the children
of God:
And if children, then heirs; heirs of
God and joint-heirs with Christ . . ."

Nothing, I say to you, in the entire New Testament quite compares with that saga of the itinerant tent-mender, the man Saul whose name, changed to Paul, indicates the transformation that took place in his own life. In your profile of miracles he remains Exhibit A -- so it would seem to some of us, a complete transformation of a man who says, "I have become a new creature, a new person entirely."

Now because this happened to him he felt as though he had to tell everyone. No matter where he went, this was the story, this was what God could do for a man: He can add, if you please, an eternal dimension to his life.... ..He can lift him above the imprisonment of this present world and declare him a child of his Heavenly Father.

In the preparation for this sermon I understandably read this entire Epistle, chapter after chapter, laying aside what I have already known of it,

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how the great missionary is trying to establish certain theological premises, certain doctrines, concerning the relationship of man to God and God to man. I put aside all of these things. And then I tried to read it with a kind of freshness, to discover something of the spirit of the man who is writing the letter. Oh, I knew full well that he was writing to a people that he might never be able to visit, that he was also writing to people that he longed to visit, that he was also writing to a people that he had never seen, and was not at all responsible for the establishment of the Christian cause within their community.....but a man having been obsessed by the fact that he was a living, walking miracle. And he just had to tell people about it.

And as he surveyed the human scene, he discovered what some of us discover today -- a kind of meaninglessness, a people frustrated, for whom there seems to be no way out, no purpose whatsoever. Small wonder, then, that one of the writings of our day commanding our attention, not to be ignored -- NO EXIT -- so pathetic is human existence, then and now.

As the Apostle Paul wrote, he wanted them to understand that there could be such a thing as a spring in one's step, such a thing as the light in one's eyes, there could be a song in a man's heart. So terrible has our day become that one of the things I'm constrained to say to certain people at times is this, that perhaps the most pathetic thing about the younger generation is that they hardly know how to laugh. Has something so terrible happened to us that we've been as a kind of depressant upon them? Where is the vitality that becomes the Christian Faith?

If only Paul were here in person. But he is, you see, to a degree, in the letters that he has written for all times, in which he makes known to us

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- - - we're not orphaned in the universe - - - we're children! - - children of a Heavenly Father! And underline boldly now the descriptive, of a Heavenly Father. It's only as we purposely understand our relationship to a Heavenly Father can we have any rightful understanding of our existence here on earth.

It's the eternal dimension that we need most today. Then it gives to us a measure of assurance. That old Sunday School hymn we used to sing had a perfectly good title: Blessed Assurance! And we owe its theme to that man Paul, who had gotten far beyond the stage of debating the question: "Am I saved or am I not?" Our untheological way of putting it would be: "Is there a way out?" He stoutly maintained that anyone led by God's Spirit could freely consider himself as God's son. Now think that over for a good long while and see if the net result isn't a new dimension to your life.

Says the Apostle Paul, "We're God's children. We are the heirs of God. God has something to give us." And then if you really want something startling, he says, "We're joint-heirs with Jesus Christ".....as much as to say, everything that God has given to Jesus Christ He gives to you and to me. Now if that isn't enough to lift a man's head and to enable him to persevere with patience the course that remains for him to run, ere he breathes his last!

But isn't it a sad thing to admit, we who have so much really have so very little. I ask your indulgence now, I want to read a quotation for you. It's a rather lengthy quotation. I'm not wont to do this thing ordinarily, but it's a statement written by a Britisher, Stephen Neill, an able theologian,

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a very perceptive mind. He visited America, went to some of our plays on Broadway, read some of our novels, watched our television, conversed with people in the airlines terminals....then he went back, surveyed the scene in his own Britain, wrote a book. He is speaking to them, but the echo of his voice ought to be heard clearly here. Let me read it for you directly. It's said far better than I could say it, and it's something that we need to hear:

"We have never had it so good. And yet the effort to be merely human, to live in our own little world, does not seem to be entirely successful. We have a wonderful welfare state, with all that heart can desire and plenty of leisure; we are just beginning to discover that in this welfare state we are likely to become extremely bored, a thing our ancestors, with their more strenuous and less comfortable lives, never had time to be. Frustration is the great disease of the modern world . . . "

Now listen carefully.....

"Not long ago a brilliant young psychiatrist told me that there had been a marked change in the type of patient who came to see the expert in mental sickness and its cure. Formerly, the patient had some definite symptom, mental or psychosomatic, and for such it was not difficult to find something that could be done. Now the trouble is negative rather than positive; the sick person is sick because he can find no particular reason for living, nothing to lift him above the drab round of trivial existence. That is a sickness for which it is very hard to find any cure . . . "

But if the Apostle Paul were here he'd say, "But this is what I'm trying to tell you - - there is this meaninglessness, there is this purposelessness. You know why? Because you don't really know who you are. And until you really know who you are, life just doesn't have its meaning."

It was Edmund Steimle, in his superb fashion, who told us the other night at the Evangelism Conference about that cartoon that impressed him in the NEW YORKER. It's a suburbanite....presumably he's gotten up, taken his

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his shower, taken enough time to get his breakfast, dressed immaculately, and has gone down to the railroad station to get the commuter train. The cartoonist shows him returning within minutes, to be greeted by his wife, still in curlers and housecoat, at the door, and then the caption....."Suddenly it occurred to me as I went to get onto the train to be part of the rat-race - - Why?"and a good sermon, you see. Unless one can answer the question why, there is no need to get on the train, there is no need to become involvedhonestly, there is no need to go on living!

....says the Apostle Paul, you know what! - - we're children of the Heavenly Father - - that means we have an eternal dimension to our life, and that also means that everything that God has He's going to give us.....that means the resources of Heaven are available here on earth!

I for one lament the fact that we no longer talk about angels. I honestly believe that when there was a generation that talked about angels, at least it lifted our thoughts toward Heaven. We're the earthbound pilgrims, so close to the earth that we never know that there's a window that opens toward Heaven. Says the Apostle Paul, "We are children of God, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ" - - - that means God has something to give us. There's a bequest, He's willing us something. Usually in legal terms a man has to die before his bequest is made operative. Paul would say, you're missing the point if you belabor that too much, and what I'm telling you, in God's case, everything that God wants to give He's making available to you right now.

I wish you could do it, but it's impractical and unrealistic, of course, to stand with me, or to stand with any pastor, when perhaps within the little circle of friends and family you do what's seldom done these days....to wait out the

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hour of death. So on Friday I was able to say, as she finished her earthly pilgrimage, to the family I could say, "But she's already in God's hands -- she's already been part of the Kingdom." Eternal life is not something to get later on, it's something that is being made available to you now, an eternal dimension is present here and now. So God makes the bequest possible.

And whenever a man makes a bequest he makes it, not because somebody demands it, not, generally speaking, because somebody can earn it or deserve it. The bequest is made according to the nature and the character of the testator, the person who wants to write it into his will. So God, because He is God and a God of love, gives us what we could never earn, what we could never deserve. What is it that we inherit? We inherit eternal life, we inherit the Kingdom. You don't earn your way into the Kingdom -- you receive the Kingdom, it comes as a gift.

In this very demanding schedule of meeting with the soon-to-be-confirmed young people of the parish, hour after hour, in the half-hour interviews, occasionally we touch upon their Confirmation verse.....and the youngster replies. The Confirmation verse is carefully chosen, and sometimes speaking specifically to their own condition.....

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Kingdom
of Heaven"

...God, giving you these things now, I can say to them, -- not later -- now you're already in the Kingdom. These are your resources -- the real thing only bears God's stamp.

I want to close with a very simple illustration. It's drawn from a novel.

Perhaps you'll recognize it -- did it bear the title "The Great Necklace" or "The Pearl Necklace"? Well, that is beside the point. This is the story. Let me tell it to you in my own words.....

.....they had received an invitation to a gala occasion. They were simple folk. In anticipation of going, the wife said, in typical womanly fashion, "But I haven't a thing to wear," and so he suggested that perhaps she might be able to borrow the gown of her friend. So she went to see the friend and told her the circumstances, and her friend allowed her to borrow the gown. She looked absolutely lovely in it. And then the woman said, "A gown as lovely as this needs a necklace," and so she borrowed from her friend the necklace. She thought it well-nigh priceless, that necklace that she borrowed....and off they went to the gala occasion, a very pleasant evening.

...and when it was over they retired to their residence, talked about the evening, reflected upon it, and as they were ready to go to bed she discovered the necklace was gone. Horrified - - "What shall I do?" Then she had this impulse....."In the morning I will tell my friend that I broke the clasp on the necklace and I'm getting it repaired, and when it's repaired I will return it to her -- it may take a little time, but I'll return it."

....now what do they do in the meantime, you see? They gather together whatever funds they can, and they actually bargain away the remaining years of their life to accumulate enough money to purchase a necklace, what they think is identical to the one they had borrowed - - bargain away the remaining years of their life. So the necklace is returned.

...the weeks, the months, the years pass.....and one day the two women meet. And when they meet the woman who had borrowed the necklace speaks out, calls her friend by name, but the person ignores her. And the woman says, "You don't re-

member me! I'm the one who borrowed your necklace." And then the woman said, "But whatever happened to you? You look so different -- you look so old -- you look so worn-out.".....so the thing had taken its toll.

....then in complete honesty the woman told her the story -- it was not a broken clasp, it was a lost necklace that had been returned...and how they bargained away their years in order that the necklace might be replaced. And then the woman gave her the strangest of all reactions, as much as to say, "To bargain away your years for that necklace! -- it wasn't the real thing! -- it was made out of paste, it really wasn't worth much."

It is a parable, my friend. So we mistakenly run out the course of our years, sacrificing ourselves for that which isn't the real thing, burning up our energy, driving our lives for things that do not become the children of God. And all the while God stands with an outstretched hand and says.....

"The Kingdom

....Love

...Truth

....Righteousness

...your unbroken relationship with Me

....this is the real thing! I give it to you!"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"PERFECT PEOPLE"

Sunday by Sunday, ever since last September, this parade of names and titles given to the early Christians passes before us. Today's sermon is based upon this title, this distinction: "Perfect People"; and the text, one of the most arresting of all the passages in the New Testament, the 48th verse of the 5th chapter of Matthew:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father
which is in Heaven is perfect."

Chances are that you could lose interest in this sermon even before it begins. Its very title is enough to cause you to shy away. For if there is one thing that you know yourself not to be, it is that you're not perfect. And if there's a fact of which you are more certain even than that, it's that people with whom you associate, other people -- they're not perfect.

For a group of folks who, when they gather together on a Sunday morning, begin by referring to themselves -- you recognize the words, don't you? -- "We poor sinners" such a title as "perfect people" surely seems incongruous. Yet the descriptive can't be ignored as we recall the words of Jesus: "Be ye therefore perfect." Then there was Paul's way of putting it: "to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." - - - now there you really have a spiritual hard-swallow --- to present every man perfect? We might be willing to say that there are some people who can approximate perfection much more so than others, but then there are always those whom we write off the list, write them off as completely hopeless.....using a word, incidentally, that ought never to occur in the vocabulary of the Christian. Even our Moslem friends out-run some of us

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when, looking at a tiny scrap of paper, say, it's still important, no matter how insignificant, no matter how trivial, because a devout Moslem says, even on that tiny scrap of paper there's room enough on which to write the name Allah, which is God. And if we understand the Christian Gospel, when our Lord was here on earth He always saw the possibility in every man. Well this does give you a spiritual hard-swallow. And if you haven't lost interest in the sermon before now, then one can easily slip away at this point.

What shall we make of this word perfect? It would be a simple thing if you could read the Bible and ignore certain verses, but you can't. It would be a simple thing if you could read the Bible with scissors in hand, and cut out those verses with which you don't agree, cut out those verses that you might not be able to fully appreciate. But this is not a recommended procedure. Rather than shy away from the words, let us come to grips with them.

I'll grant you, it may be a measure of comfort to know that some translators take that word "perfect" and soften it a bit, and say by perfect we mean mature, that is, a fruit has come into perfection when it has fully matured. Or they take the word "perfect" and say it's ripe, and you know then that it attains the thing for which it was meant. Well that word "perfect" -- use the word mature, use the word ripe if you wish, but nonetheless it still remains.....a state of perfection.

Even J. B. Phillips, to whom some of us turn ever so easily in our better understanding of the Scriptures, continues to use the word perfect: "Be ye therefore perfect." The most recent of all the American translations, that hard-back edition, uses the word perfect.

Well maybe we can say this to ourselves...."A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a Heaven for?" It's only as a man has an ideal that he

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makes any progress whatsoever. When some of us have gone to the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen, we'd instinctively have fallen upon our knees, as we saw the inviting Christ, with outstretched arms, in heroic-size, sculptured there above the altar, saying 'Come unto me.'....then in the niches on either side, the heroic-size statues of the apostles....not far away is the Thorwaldsen Museum.....

....and yet Thorwaldsen tells us that any time that he felt that he had achieved or attained, he began to cry inside, because this in itself was a kind of stifling to his spirit. A man must always have something yet beyond which he ought to go. So it seems to me that Jesus Christ is saying to us, "Set for yourself the standard of perfection" because only as you strive after perfection is there any hope for the improvement of your lot and your growth in the Christian life!

John Wesley, perhaps more than any man in his day, and perhaps more than any man in our day, took this ever so seriously. John Wesley had twin words in his vocabulary. One was conversion. He honestly believed that no man could call himself a Christian who was not twice-born, who did not have a conversion experience. He himself had come, as an ordained minister of the Gospel, even to America, to try to convert the Indians, but he lacked power. He went back disgruntled and discouraged. It was on May 25th, was it?, 1735, at a quarter to nine in the evening that he said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed" while somebody was using Luther's Commentary on the Romans. Then it was that he was converted. He was wont to believe that something like this ought to happen to every man, that every Christian should be a twice-born person. Wesley made much of it.

But I told you he had another word in his vocabulary. Wesley talked a great deal about perfection. He knew full well that conversion was never enough. It's never enough just to turn a man around and face him in another direction, because once a man has been converted, then he is meant to make progress in the direction that he is now facing. Let me say it again, it's never enough to turn around and face in the right direction. This is something. But its full meaning is invalid until a man begins to step away from the point where he has been turned, and then continually move in the proper direction. So Wesley was talking a great deal about what he called being made perfect, maturing, ripening, growing in the Christian faith, and that it's not the real thing unless a man can see the signs of growth.

You might not fully appreciate John Wesley, and I'm reasonably certain that you wouldn't appreciate a preacher of his stripe who would be your pastor and would do the kind of thing that Wesley did when he took this doctrine so seriously. He took it so seriously, honestly believing that a man ought to give evidence of perfection, that is growth, now, spiritual maturation.....a man ought to give evidence of it. So in 1743 he went to Newcastle, and he examined the entire congregation, looking for evidences of growth, another way of saying perfection. By the time he was finished he purged 140 from the church roll. You might be interested in the list: 2 for swearing; 2 for Sabbath breaking, 17 for drunkenness; 2 for retailing spiritous liquors; 3 for quarreling; 1 for wife beating; 3 for willful lying; 1 for laziness (Laziness!); 29 for lightness and carelessness.....as though to emphasize the fact that this business of being a Christian is a serious thing, never to be taken in a light-hearted manner, never to be dealt with carelessly.

Seventeen years later, by the way, he went to Cornwall, and there he purged 500 names from a congregation that listed 1700, as he looked for signs of growth in a man's Christian life.

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The lamentable thing about us is that we excuse ourselves too easily. I dreaded the role that I had to exercise the other day. I had to remonstrate with a person, in your behalf, because of certain errors that had been made. None of us likes to correct somebody else....honestly. And she simply retorted to me, "But no one's perfect, you know." Of course we know this! And no one knows it better than Jesus Christ! Yet Jesus Christ says, "Be therefore perfect".....and brace yourself, - - "Be perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." This is the kind of standard that He sets before us.

The sad thing about the Christian religion is that all too many of us have all too easily leveled off and written our own excuses, as though God himself intended us to just take the ordinary, lack-lustre way through life. If the world owes a debt to anyone, it owes a debt to the perfectionist. You might find it an intolerable experience to live with one, but the world is forever better because of those who are constantly saying to us: "Strive -- in God's name -- attempt something over and beyond what you now are." When a man strives toward perfection he's always part of a growing process. When you no longer strive to become perfect you're no longer growing.

If it were possible to assess your own spiritual growth and development as over against the past year, the past two years, how clearly evident are the signs of spiritual maturation in your own life? I'm always troubled when I meet with people to discover evidence of re-trenchment, a little less love, a little less tolerance, than what they might have had a year ago, or perhaps in this situation as over against another situation. It's a pathetic thing. It can happen ever so easily.

This whole matter of perfection is a matter of growth. Doesn't Dickens

speak to us in one of his works entitled, "Great Expectations" when he introduces us to a character who had been swept off her feet by a scoundrel....he had proposed....they made all the plans for the wedding...the date was set. The day had arrived. The bride was in her wedding gown, the table for the feast was spread, the guests were coming near. Then, at twenty minutes to nine in the morning, the letter arrived, in which the groom was saying the thing was all off.....

....embittered, and with a curse upon her love, she refused to take off her wedding gown, she refused to allow anyone to touch the spread table, and it remained until it decayed, moldered away. She decreed that every clock in her house would be kept at the precise moment of twenty minutes to nine. Her life stopped at that point. There was no longer any growth and development, no longer, if you please, a striving for something better. And she withered away, wearing her wedding gown, an embittered and eccentric soul.

I haven't told the most important thing about this text. It comes at the end of the 5th chapter, the 5th chapter of Matthew, in which Jesus Christ has been talking about relationships with people. I'd better give you the quotation as it's found in the Good Book:

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?
And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?
Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

.....and here He is putting the full weight of all that He is saying on this matter of perfection, that we are to strive after God's standard in maintaining the principle of love as we deal with people.

It's not even easy sometimes to love some of your friends, let alone love your enemies, but this is the standard of perfection which Jesus Christ puts in front of us. He remains the supreme optimist, doesn't He. Yet without this hope we could be of all people the most miserable. I beg you then, as your Pastor, don't take people to task overmuch because they're not perfect, but look upon them as people who have the potential for becoming perfect, and then in your relationship with them, help them to become that!isn't that one reason why Jesus Christ came to us?

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
May 7, 1967

O GOD, we praise and magnify Thy name, for Thou hast created us;

O GOD, we praise and magnify Thy name, because Thou hast redeemed us;

O GOD, we praise and magnify Thy name because Thou dost sanctify us,
preserve us in the Faith.

As a people gathered together we are mindful of mercies that cannot
even be numbered. It is by Thy goodness and by Thy Grace that we
are here.

But as each makes his own confession unto Thee, O God, none of us
has ever found it easy to follow, to follow in the footsteps of
Jesus Christ. Yet once we've been encountered by Him we have no
choice. If we remain in the Company it's only because we're drawn
by Him, empowered by Thy Holy Spirit. So we praise and magnify Thy
Holy Name the more.

O GOD, hear our prayer now as we wait before Thee, for those whom
we know who carry a greater burden, whose frustrations are grievous,
whose disappointments they may not now tell to any save Thee. We
pray for them.

And we pray for Thy Holy Christian Church throughout all the world,
wherever there are those who take the light of Thy Gospel. May they
continue to strive after Thee, knowing that only as they strive can
they be sustained.

O GOD, we pray Thee for this congregation, for those numbered within
this company who make it easier for us to believe in Thy goodness,
and to set before us a good example of love and charity, grace.

Now send each of us on his way in the certain knowledge that he does
not walk alone, he walks in the company of Him who is able to guide,
to protect and to sustain.

OUR FATHER.....

"THE ISRAEL OF GOD"

It is doubly interesting that as this year, since last September, we've considered the different titles given to the early Christians, that we should come on this day of Pentecost to consider this word given to the Christian Church: the title - "Israel of God." And the text, from Paul's Letter to the Galatians, the 6th chapter, it's his last chapter, incidentally, and almost his last verse:

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

Perhaps you wouldn't know it unless I called it to your attention, that these kind and gracious words really constitute the words of a man who had almost run out of patience. It was only by the grace of God that he had been able to write chapter after chapter as earnestly and deliberately as he did, that he comes now to this very kind and lovely way by which to end a letter, and yet quite deliberately. Because after he has said this kind of benediction, he also writes, as now practically his last words:

"From henceforth let no man trouble me - - "

....as much as to say, "Now that I have said it, there isn't anything else that ought to be said."

Let me fill you in on some very interesting details. This letter was written by Paul to the Galatians as a man who was under personal attack. As a messenger of the Lord Jesus Christ there were those who were attacking him personally and saying that he was not qualified to speak, they questioned his credentials. When they couldn't make very much headway on that score, then as

avowed enemies, you see, they had to find something else. And when they could no longer attack him personally, then they began to attack him according to his message, and they leveled their attacks against what he was preaching.

Now as far as qualifications, perhaps they were right, using their standards, because the measure of an apostle, according to the early Church, was that after Judas had betrayed and his position was to be filled, that those who had been numbered thereafter would have to be people who had been in the company of Jesus Christ while He was here on earth. Add secondly, they would have to be people who were witnesses to the Resurrection. Now Paul, honestly, could not qualify on either of these scores. So they thought they had him.

But knowing the integrity of his own Christian experience, he declared himself fit to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. He would say, perhaps, "I am the least" -- because he knew the kind of man he was before Jesus Christ came to him. "Nonetheless, I am an apostle -- "....not using man's measuring rod, but standing firmly upon the integrity of his very valid experience that he had in his encounter with Jesus Christ, the net result being that he was a completely new person.

Now they came and said, "Your message is not valid".....a group of Judaizers, a disturbing sect....

....this is always the frightening thing in the Christian family, that the devil should be at work, and bring people inside the Christian family who raise questions, and who question, if not the integrity of the preacher, then the integrity of the message.....

....now these Judaizers, in their hostility, were so foolish, mind you, as to come up with something like this -- they said, "God gave us

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something as Israelites, and what God gave to the Israelites was a peculiar blessing, and therefore we cannot have it as Christians unless we first become Jewish".....imagine a teaching like that! -- that anyone who wanted to become Christian first had to become circumcized, a true mark of an Israelite!

So the Apostle Paul, carrying this around as a burden of his heart, finally decided to write the Galatians a letter, and to set the matter right, once and forever. That's what you find in the letter that he wrote to them.

Now let's look at this title, "The Israel of God." It's a fascinating title. What did it originally mean? What ought it mean to us, as on this day we celebrate the birth of the Christian Church? If we are to be the true Israel, what, now, does the name mean?

Originally, Israel -- they were the chosen ones. Of all the people on the face of the earth, God chose Israel. They were the called ones -- they were separated from the rest of the world, and every Israelite knew that. Now, says the Apostle Paul, we are the Israel of God -- look at it this way! Honestly now, we who constitute membership in the Christian Church, we are the true Israel, because God has called us.....we who constitute membership in the Christian Church, we are the chosen ones.

My friend, don't shy away from that. It's a perfectly good thing to say about the Christian Church. We are the called, we are the chosen. The word ecclesia by which we get our word ecclesiastical -- its root meaning means called. So if you should be here this afternoon at five o'clock, and in that very precious moment in the Confirmation Service you see the young people come up to the altar, and you see the hand in blessing placed upon them, representing the blessing of the Church.....in reality, each youngster is responding to

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a call of God, and a call from God. For what is the Church but the called-out, and the called-together and the gathered-in-one-place? This is what the Church is. And mark you it well upon the fabric of your mind, every time you and I have helped them in their Christian growth and development we have been inspiring them and encouraging them to respond to God's call. For this is what the Holy Spirit does, this is how the Church comes about.

The old Israel -- they were the chosen, they were the called.

The new Israel -- we are the chosen, we are the called.

When Israel thought of herself, she thought of herself as a people holy in God's sight. We who are the new Israel, we call ourselves the Holy Christian Church. And again let me say to you, don't be afraid of that word holy. It's a perfectly good word in the Christian vocabulary.

Holy really comes, some people say, from the Anglo-Saxon wholly, meaning wholly given to God. In a far deeper sense, it means a people being made holy, a people being sanctified.....and that's exactly one of the works of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify us, and to enable us to grow in grace.

The people of Israel looked upon themselves, then, as a people holy in God's sight. So we who constitute membership in the Christian Church should look upon ourselves as a people holy in God's sight.....different. The Israelite was different because he kept the law...the Israelite was different because he had the mark upon his flesh...the Israelite was even different because of the food that he ate, and what he did on a certain day of the week that was set aside wholly for the Lord.....

.....in the New Israel, we too are different....different because we have a rule to keep, not simply the rule of the Old Covenant, but now the rule of love, God's indwelling in our hearts.

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But let me speak for a minute about the rule. There are those who emphasize wrongly that in the Christian Gospel there is no such thing as law -- only freedom, the freedom that comes to men baptized by the Spirit of God, recipients of His grace. But even Jesus Christ expects us to live an ordered, a disciplined life in His name, to live the life according to the rule of the Spirit! That's why Paul says in the text that immediately precedes this one, "For in Jesus Christ there is neither circumcision that avails or uncircumcision that avails, but only a new creation, and as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

Now what is the mark that's upon us, as we live by the free spirit of God's rule in our hearts? That's a good rule by which to live -- God's free reign in our hearts.....but the problem that you and I have, even as Christians, belonging to the new Israel, is that the Old Adam continues to rule. It's a frightening thing to discover how often, even in our noblest intentions, we hear the feeble echo of our own weak voice, when it ought to be the echo of God's redeeming grace.

Jesus Christ said in what He offered as a mark for the New Israel:

"By this all men shall know that ye are my
disciples, if ye have love one to another."

We who are the New Israel, we are to have a distinction. And what is that distinction, except it be the rule of love? The Apostle Paul knew only one thing, that Jesus Christ suffered and died for him. The rule for the Christian and the New Israel is that he might practice something of this suffering love.

Now allow me to let the full impact of this sermon rest at this point. A pastor once told me that the heaviest burden that he carried in his own heart in behalf of his own people was to discover every now and then how little love some people in his own congregation had for other members in that same congregation. Jesus Christ is a demanding master. He who is the Great Head of the Church may excuse us for a number of things, but one thing from which He will not excuse us is the absence of love:

"By this shall all men know that ye are my
disciples, if ye have love one to another."

This is the mark of the New Israel.

Now, says the Apostle Paul, I told you this, and as far as I am concerned, I don't want to be bothered by this thing any more! I know my integrity, I know that I am a new man in Christ, and I know the Gospel that I preach to you, that there is no other name under Heaven whereby we can be saved! Now grace, mercy and peace be to you, and if it will satisfy you any, call yourself the Israel of God. But know exactly what that means, and what God exacts from people who are called the Israel of God.

Then I give you his own word for it, he ends his Letter to the Galatians in this manner - - "From henceforth don't let anybody trouble it." Then he says, "Grace be unto you from the Lord Jesus Christ, that he may be with your spirit."

I want to bring this sermon to a kind of conclusion by reciting for you a story from Maxim Gorky. I wish I had it in front of me, to read it word by word. Gorky tells it in an eloquent manner.....

It's the story of a man who is charged with the responsibility of being a caretaker of quite an estate in Siberia. The owner could be there only in

certain weeks in the summer months, when it could be really inhabited, but the remainder of the year he entrusted it to this old man. And the old man is telling the story to his grandchild, and he holds her spellbound.

He says, "One night I heard something, I heard people approaching. Whether it was one or two, at first I could not tell. Then I discovered it was two. As they neared the building I could hear them stealing into the one part of the structure, and they went up on the roof, only to come back on the other side of the building and to secret themselves in a passageway. I came upon them by complete surprise....with rifle in hand I confronted them -- and one of them with an axe, about to hurl it at me, and I think he would have killed me...."

And the grandchild, spellbound, said, "and what did you do, Granddaddy, what did you do?"

And he said, "With rifle in hand, I kept them at bay, and then I said, 'Into the woods, both of you! Into the woods'....and then I ordered them to pick up some sturdy sticks, and then to come back to me....and as they came back, I said, 'Now, you -- bare your back, remove your clothing'....and when he had done this, then I said to the other one -- 'You -- pick up your stick -- without mercy, beat him!'....and so he did."

"And then what, Granddaddy?"

And the old man said, as he continued the story, "And with whatever strength the other one had, I said to him, 'Now, you beat your companion!' And when they were both left there, fairly limp, humiliated, beaten, one of them in a whimpering voice said....'Please -- bread -- something to drink!'

"Granddaddy, did you give it to them?"...as much as to imply, in the sound

of her voice, I hope you didn't.....

He said, "Grandchild, I helped them to get cleaned up, I gave them bread, I gave them drink....I kept them the whole winter through, and then I sent them on their way in the spring, new men."

And then without waiting for the grandchild to ask, "Why? How could you do it, Granddaddy?"....he simply said, "And in this wicked old world of ours, somebody has to be good."

My friend, maybe that's what God is saying to us in the Christian Church...
...in this wicked old world of ours, somebody has to be the example of love, and of kindness. That's what my heart's desire is for this congregation, that's what every pastor, shepherd and bishop of your souls would want for his people anyway. Oh, the hostilities that arise within us sometimes when we think of one another, and when the Old Adam arises so that we sell one another short.

Says the Apostle Paul - - "You are the called.....you are the chosen!

This shall be your mark - - "....as he could well echo the voice of Jesus Christ....

"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,
if ye have love, one to another."

This is the mark of the Church. And I say to you, if it can't be found here, in this wicked old world, where, then, is it to be found?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
May 14, 1967

O GOD, let what we bring before Thee now, the gift of our hands, the substance of our living, be accompanied by the rededication of our minds and of our spirits.

And ere we leave this holy place, accept, we beseech Thee, the acknowledgment that we make that all that we have, we have received,

- that we enter the world as a debtor, a world waiting to receive us, the good earth, by whose bounty we are sustained physically;

- the Holy Christian Church, that mothers us in the Faith, whose Saviour, with arms outstretched, waits to receive us in the time of our baptism,

- and who, as we continue to grow and develop, gives us the Lord and Saviour of men, with arms outstretched, calling us, waiting to receive us at the time of our Confirmation;

- a Church that waits with arms outstretched to receive us when the Gospel is being proclaimed, and when the Sacraments are being offered, that we may ever be nurtured and sustained;

- a waiting Christ who at journey's end, stands with arms outstretched to receive us into Heaven above.

O GOD, we are debtors. What have we that we have not received?

And even now we thank Thee for mothers waiting to receive us with their love and their devotion at the time of birth, or any who take the place of a mother, and sacrificially extend to us the devotion of their lives, from whose hands we first took the Scriptures, perchance; at whose knee, perhaps, we first were taught to pray, by whose hand we were guided toward the House of the Lord, and who to this very day, as on this earth or in Heaven they continue to pray for us, that we might remain faithful.

FOR THESE blessings, O God, we give Thee thanks and praise Thy Holy Name, in the Name of Christ who came as a child and made the heart of Mary glad.

OUR FATHER.....

May 14, 1967

"LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION"

There are few moments in the life of any pastor that can quite match the time when he stands with a group of young men and women who will publicly profess faith in Jesus Christ.

Last September we began this road together as eighth-graders preparing for this day. But that was just the final round of the preparation. The preparation for this moment before God had been going on ever since you were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. You may remember how we talked face-to-face in that room at Bethany, how in the presence of your parents I could say that we would be looking forward to this day....looking forward to this day because your parents had kept a promise that they had made on your behalf.

They brought you to God's House as soon as possible, they had you named for Jesus Christ, and they promised that from that day onward they would set before you a good example -- love and truth would rule their hearts. They would bring you to God's House, they would put in your hands the Scriptures, they would teach you how to pray, they would introduce you to Jesus Christ. And then one day, such as this one, you would be old enough to understand what they had done for you, and then you could say publicly whether or not you wanted to continue.

This, now, is the day for your making of a promise. They have kept theirs.

What can I say to you in this precious moment that you spend before God? Well, as usual I turn to the Good Book, and it's one particular pas-

sage of Scripture that commands our attention, enough to make the title for this sermon, brief as it may be, "Letter of Recommendation;" and the text, it's in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the third chapter:

"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:"

On this day of your Confirmation I am pleased to tell you that in a certain sense you are Exhibit A as far as this congregation is concerned. If anyone were to ask us: What can a person do with the Christian Faith? what kind of a person is it who believes in Jesus Christ with all his heart?

....in good faith could I not turn to you, in good faith could I not reach for one of you, take you by the hand and have you stand alongside of me and say, "Here - - this is a product of a Christian home, this is the net result of Christian education -- this is what it's like to become a believer."

There are certain things about this text that trouble us. Reading it very, very carefully, it could be said that this text really means that you become the recommendation of us. Momentarily let us think of that.

...whatever Jesus Christ has meant to us is now stamped upon you.

...what Jesus Christ has meant to me is somehow now part of your life.

...what Jesus Christ has meant to each of your teachers in the small group sessions is now part of your life.

...what Jesus Christ has meant to your father, to your mother, to every Sunday School teacher that you have ever had -- you are the accumulated result of all of their influences upon your life.

And that's one way of reading this text, because Paul is now saying, "You are

our letter of recommendation -- the kind of Christians we are is now stamped upon you."

A careful reading of the text also shows that it's the Holy Spirit who does the writing. We don't do it. It's the Holy Spirit that's at work in your life, and through you. And when you think of a letter you think of something that received the inscribing of the pen. Paul also says that this inscription is upon the tablets of your heart, that's where it's really registering. And that's why, in your very special moment before God, when the question is put to you, "Do you love the Lord Jesus? Do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?".....you answer, "Yes, with my whole heart." For if I were to look for Jesus Christ now, I would look for Him in your heart.

There's another thing about this text that commands your attention. You are our epistle, written on your hearts, written on our hearts, and to be read of all men. Become fully aware of that, new recruit for the Kingdom. Everybody, in one way or another, will take notice of your Christian integrity. I once read a book that had the title, "Make Your Life Count." That isn't a good title. A better title would be, "Make Your Life Count For Good." Every life does count. You'll be influencing people, and you'll be influencing them for either good or evil! As a Christian, make your life count for God.

Now, says the Apostle Paul, you're going to be read by all people, not just your own Christian friends but your non-Christian friends. They're going to observe your actions, they're going to make note of your attitudes. Maybe you didn't read it, but in "Pages in a Diary" notation in this Sunday's bulletin, something that arrests the thought of everybody: somebody once said, I know exactly why Christianity makes so little progress -- because there are so few Christians who are exactly like Jesus Christ."

Now you have a right to be called Christian, but people have a right to find Jesus Christ in you if you're going to take that name. So you are our letter of recommendation, you're our Exhibit A -- you are what it means to be a Christian, not just today, but as long as you live.

And that's why in the Confirmation Service the question is also put, "Will you be found faithful?".....that means every day. In the Kingdom you sign up for life! and the Christian never takes a holiday from God's service. Every day you witness for Him. May God bless you. May you ever find increasing joy in being -- shall I put it this way -- a good representative for Jesus Christ. His Kingdom goes forward through you. You are His preferred method. God works best, person-to-person. Who was the woman who put it this way for us.....

Christ has no hands but our hands
To do his work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead them in his way'
He has no tongue but our tongues
To tell them how he died;
He has no help but our help
To bring them to his side.

Now listen carefully as you remember the title for this sermon, "Letter of Recommendation"....

We are the only Bible
The careless world will read;
We are the sinners' gospel,
We are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message,
Given in deed and word;
What if the line is crooked?
What if the type be blurred?

I close with a very simple story. It's a matter of a legend.

Somebody is supposed to have said to Jesus Christ as He was leaving this earth: "What's going to happen to your kingdom now that you're going away?"

And he said, "Why, I put my Kingdom into the hands of - - "

...and then He named the disciples - - just as He could
name your names now, one by one.....

And the person in the story said, "You're putting the kingdom into their
hands!"

...as much as to say, "They're going to be your letter of
recommendation!"

" - - and what if they fail you? what if they don't do it?"

And Jesus Christ is supposed to have answered,

"It's the best plan I have

I have no other plan."

You are as important as all that in the Kingdom of God.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

May 28, 1967

"THE MEANING OF INFANT BAPTISM"

Yesterday as I fully realized that at each of our morning hours today a child would be presented for the Sacrament of Baptism, it seemed right and proper that I should put aside the sermon that I had fully planned to preach, another in the concluding series dealing with the names and titles given to the early Christians, and rather that I should invite your attention to this subject: "The Meaning of Infant Baptism". The text, therefore, is from the second chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the 38th, the 39th verses:

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children . . ."

Where the Sacrament of Infant Baptism is observed in Christian congregations it could be that more than 95% of those who are parents present their children for the sacrament as soon after birth as reasonably possible. Yet someone has observed that while this fact may be impressive and significant, it could be said that not everyone who presents his child for the Sacrament of Baptism fully realizes what's involved, and therefore the church is in duty bound, again and ever so often, to call her people to the proper remembrance of the basic teaching of the sacrament.

You'll be delighted to know that in this congregation the pattern is now being established that on Saturday night preceding the time when the children are presented for baptism, a special conference is conducted with the parents

and with the sponsors, and together we discuss the meaning of infant baptism. Such a conference already having been held notwithstanding, we come now in this way to think about the meaning of baptism.

I recognize at once that it's a controversial subject. Even within this Christian family of God there is not agreement as to the meaning, the method or the mode of baptism itself. However, we ought not to shy away from it just because it could be a controversial subject. There is enough in this whole subject of baptism that reminds us of the Christian Gospel itself that it should command our attention and our concern. So one might well afford to ask the question: why should these people present their children for the Sacrament of Baptism? and why should you and I as members of the congregation come to attention, and also become involved, in the baptism of somebody else's child? - - because, in truth, the whole Christian Church becomes involved every time a child is named for Jesus Christ. Therefore let us give heed and appreciate anew the meaning of baptism.

One begins at this point: from a Christian point of view, what is a child? Within the Christian context, a child is always to be understood as a gift from God. Nothing between a man and a woman is more precious than when the fact is clearly established that they are entering into partnership with God in the transmission of human life. Nothing between a man and a woman means quite as much as the realization of the truth that parenthood will be theirs.

In the conferences that we had here at Saint Luke Church when a couple looks forward to being married, there are a number of questions that are asked, and there are those of you within the hearing of this man's voice right

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now who will recognize the interview and the session that you had -- this question, that question, and then we come to this one: How do you feel about children? The church has a right to ask this question, because from the very beginning when marriage was instituted by God, it meant that a family, if at all possible, would be established....and when a child looms on the horizon, from the very beginning the child should be surrounded with love and with an understanding on the part of the parents of their responsibility. So, from the Christian point of view, a child is always recognized as God's gift.

Leslie Weatherhead has put it ever so beautifully when he said, "A child is a bit of two people, and God." The ancient psalmist -- even the prayer book version has it this way, from Psalm 127, the 3rd verse: "Lo, children and the fruit of the womb are a heritage and a gift from the Lord."

The Bible makes much of this. The child has a rightful place in God's plan. Some of the most beautiful, the most wonderful stories in the Bible are the stories of a child, as you turn for yourself the pages of the Old Testament, the story of this child and of that child -- either the gift as a promise by God, or the answer to a prayer.....the story of Isaac, the story of the childhood of Moses, the story of Samuel. And then when you come to the most precious of all stories, the story of the child Jesus. When God saw fit to give us His most perfect, His most wonderful gift, it was the child, the child Jesus. And Mary and Joseph were particularly chosen, were given to understand that theirs would be so great responsibility. So we begin at this point, a child must be understood as God's gift.

Now when something comes from God we are in duty bound to say to ourselves, how can we take care of so wonderful gift? What shall we do with it? What

shall we in turn provide it? Now shall we handle it, how shall we care for it?

A child begins its life as a dependent creature, and you and I as long as we live remain as dependent creatures. So as the child comes into the world, he comes waiting for what we will offer.

Well, there are the physical needs that must be met, there are the spiritual needs that must be met. I was tremendously impressed when in India I visited certain hospitals, and there I discovered a practice that has much to be said for it, perchance. In the children's ward provision was always made for the mother to stay. It was the mother who took care of the menial chores in behalf of the hospitalized child. And if at all possible, it was the mother at night who slept alongside of her child, as though in God's plan there should be the mother, there should be the father -- two people on the face of this earth more so than any other people who would be entrusted with the responsibility, if at all possible, of meeting the needs, specifically and personally, of this child. A study was made of a certain hospital in India, that where a child bereft of its parents, was not ministered to personally and directly, the child would not recover as well as it should have, nor as speedily as it should recover. It had been established that a child needs to be fondled. As someone has said, there needs to be the contact of epidermis to epidermis, where a child needs to feel even the gentle pressure of a mother's cheek against its own cheek.

This is not simply a physical need that's being met, it's the dramatization also of a spiritual need, the evidence of love and abiding concern. In God's plan there is absolutely no substitute whatsoever for the role of parenthood

in fulfilling an obligation in behalf of a child. There are those in God's plan who can assume that type of responsibility. So we say to ourselves, this, God's gift -- what can we do for him? What can we give this, our gift from God?

Primary among the things we give is spiritual ministry. I submit to you this morning that there isn't anything more important than to allow your child, through you, an understanding of the fact of God. And so you might say to yourself -- spiritually, then, we want our child to grow up Christian. This is part of the responsibility thrust upon parents who already know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

But now, what does it mean to be Christian? It's a question that ought to be asked.

.....some people think that one becomes Christian just because he's been born in a Christian land and draws the benefit of Christian culture...

.....some people think that to be Christian is to be decent and to be honorable and to be a perfectly good moral person....

.....some people think that to be Christian is to belong to the Church, to subscribe to its teachings, to support its program. Each of these answers might be good, but no single one of them is valid in its own right. It is only a partial answer.

Let me suggest that you keep this in mind as what it means to be Christian
....above all else, a Christian is a person who has come into a new relationship with God, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who as a result has come into a new relationship with the Church, which is the people of God. This immediately says there is a vertical and a horizontal relationship being established, and this is dramatized for us in the Sacrament of Baptism. God allows

us the baptism, God allows us the sacrament, because in the sacrament the truths of God are made seeable - - they are pictures made plain in front of us, of what God gives us and of what God requires from us.

Now you might say to yourself, in the Sacrament of Baptism, since it's such a great blessing, ought we not wait until the child is old enough to know that this is happening? Do we not say to ourselves, religion is such a personal thing, how, then, can I make up my mind in behalf of somebody else?

There isn't a father or a mother on the face of this earth who does not go for a certain period of time making decisions in behalf of their children, on the basis of what they know to be true. And so they do fulfill their obligations as parents. In meeting with the high school seniors at Bethany in our informal retreat sessions, we talk with them about decisions they'll have to be making on their own, and then we made plain to them whether they realized it or not, that for a good portion of their life, a greater portion of their life, by the time they reached eighteen most of the important decisions of their life had been made for them by somebody else. So on the basis of what we know to be true about the blessings of the Church, we want these blessings made available to our children....and we make the decision in their behalf... ..just as we make the decision as to what's best for them physically.

If it should be so important that a mother should decide what a child ought to eat when he's four years of age, just so it's equally important, if not more so, that the decision should be made by the parents as to the spiritual food that this child should be offered, and if necessary, required to absorb.

In the Sacrament of Baptism there are tremendous truths being dramatized for us. One is that this is the initiatory rite, if you please, into the Family

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of God, that this relationship between other Christians now is being established. In some churches, you may know, the baptismal font is not located at the chancel step, it's located just as you enter the Nave, right inside the door, perhaps off from the narthex, because even the location of the baptismal font symbolizes the fact that baptism is the entrance into the Church, into the Family of God.

There are those who tell us that infant baptism became part of the practice of the early Church in this manner: the first Christians of course were adults who heard the preaching and the proclamation of the Gospel...and then they said, what shall we do? -- "Repent, and be baptized"and then they were given the seal, the sign and the promise of the new birth, and the gift of the Spirit, and their oneness in Christ through the Body of Christ -- the assurance was vouchsafed, the baptism was the sign of it, and the sacrament was its certitude.

Then the mother looked at her baby, and she says to herself, is this child of mine outside the Church? Have I no assurance that this child of mine is included in God's Family? I am baptized, I now have this relationship with God and with the people of God. Let me have this assurance for my child as well. And so this is part of the rationale of the Sacrament of Infant Baptism, that even a child should be numbered inside the Family of God.

It's a precious thing to remember, and so the Church provides her people with the opportunity to present their children for the Sacrament of Baptism, that all that the Church offers might be vouchsafed to this child. It dramatizes, I said a while ago, the fundamental truth of the Gospel, that we are dependent upon what God gives, and the sacrament is always the sign of God's favor. In these sacraments the important thing is never what we do, but it's

what God offers, and what God gives.

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Now having said this, think for a minute of the responsibilities that fall upon us who present our children for the Sacrament of Baptism, the responsibilities that fall upon us who are members of the Church. Every time a child is baptized, every single one of us in the Christian Church becomes involved because we're part of the Family into which this child has now come. That means we must set before this child the good example. That means we must provide this child with opportunity to grow in Christian grace and nurture. Did I not read somewhere that by the time a child is four years of age, 50% of its intelligence level has already been established clearly, and its fund of knowledge is being assumed. So therefore, even in the days of childhood we are in duty bound to set before this child a good example.

Meeting with the parents of the confirmands at Bethany, what a joy I knew in my heart as I could say to them, as the youngster anticipated confirmation -- your parents have kept their promise, they have put in your hands the Scriptures, they have taught you the fact of God, they have kept you inside the Family of the Christian Church.....now, reaching this age of reason, you are making a promise in your own name....

....and I could not help but ask myself, will the confirmand be as faithful as the parent? Our attitude, our demeanor, our behavior within the Christian family becomes a deterrent, or an encouragement for the child to be faithful.

Now for those of us who are adults, every time we see a child baptized we ought to remember how our parents presented us for the Sacrament of Baptism, and how the sign and the seal of God's favor was established in our

hearts. Martin Luther in his difficult days of the Reformation period, kept his sanity only because he kept repeating in Latin to himself....

...."I have been baptized.....I have been baptized"

...meaning, I'm God's child -- I have a Heavenly Father who will provide and protect, I have a Heavenly Father whom I must serve in fear and in love, and always with obedience.

Let me close with a simple observation. What a transformation could take place in our homes, and surely in the life of a child, if every time we who have had children baptized would put them to bed at night, or as we look upon them in the course of the day, and say, "You've been baptized -- you're God's child. I must take good care of you, in God's name."

Seated under the big trees on the campus at Princeton Seminary, some of us used to gather in the summer and listen to Harris Franklin Kirk, the pastor of Franklin Street Presbyterian Church at one time in Baltimore. One day he reminded us how the old colored mammy in the South who cared for him would put him to bed at night, and said something like this (I shan't attempt the dialect)....."Harris, I got to be good to you -- you're God's child -- you've been baptized."

We parents and grandparents.....I've got to be good to you

...this child, I dare not fail you -- you're God's child."

That's what baptism means.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"STEWARDS"

Today's sermon, bearing the title, "Stewards", is the first in the four remaining in the series introduced last September on the general theme of names and titles given to the early Christians; and the text, it's I Peter, the 4th chapter, the 10th verse:

" . . . as good stewards of the varied grace of God . . . "

231 Madison Avenue, New York City, is an address that's well-known to every pastor of a Lutheran congregation, and to many people who are members of the congregations in the Lutheran Church in America. 231 Madison Avenue is the address of the brown-stone building which was once the Morgan mansion. Now it's the headquarters of the Lutheran Church in America.

Whenever a visitor goes there he realizes that the most important room on the first floor, once the drawing room in the old mansion, is now set aside as a chapel. It's done in good taste. There's a chaste altar, and above the altar a very colorful reredos. The reredos includes two Biblical inscriptions, both quotations from the lips of our Blessed Lord, who is the Great Head of the Church:

"All power is given to me in heaven and on earth"

...and the other Biblical quotation:

"Lo, I am with you always . . ."

Then there are four single words that appear in the reredos. These words you will recognize as part of the final Commission, the parting command which Jesus Christ gave to His disciples:

"Preach!"

"Teach!"

"Baptize!"

"Witness!"

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It is presumed that those who officially represent our Church will worship in this chapel. Every time I have had the good fortune to go there, as a member of a Commission or as a member of a Board, I have never been able to concentrate upon the altar and the message of the altar alone. I could not keep my thoughts altar-bound fashion. For it so happens that on the left side of the chapel there are windows that look out on the passing scene. They have never put stained glass in those windows, so that one is very colorfully and carefully screened out from the world....but as I sit and am there as a worshipper on any number of given times, from the corner of my eye there is always the distraction of 37th Street -- taxicabs coming to a screeching halt, the hurried, harried executive of Madison Avenue on his way -- and try as I would to concentrate upon the worship experience, it seemed as though people passing by were always shouting to me: "Look -- out here we are! -- out here!"

I submit to you, the distraction is not a handicap. It's a perfectly valid thing, and I would be the last person in the world to vote for putting up some kind of a screen against 37th Street. For whenever a people gather to worship, they must never see themselves as a tightly-knit company of God's people who can keep God in their own little circle. Rather, the Gospel that has been given to us when we gather to worship that we might take it to those

who are not part of our circle. The parting command of our Blessed Lord as it's reflected to us from the reredos reminds us that God has given us something.

The Gospel is the true treasure of the Church, but it's God's Gospel. The Church itself is not ours -- it's the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Significantly enough, in this sermon series we come now to the title, "Steward." And what is a steward? A steward is somebody who takes care of something that belongs to somebody else. What a steward has in his hands is never his own, it's something entrusted to him. Now that's what you and I are -- as members of the Christian Church we are stewards of God's grace! We are the hand-
lers of His Gospel. We are the sharers of what He has given to our people.

Incidentally, for any number of people across the face of the Church, when they think of 231 Madison Avenue, they think of it as a place where some of our money goes, the receiver of our apportionment, the disbursing of funds that we gather together and send to them -- well, this really isn't bad, either!...

...because you and I are not about to start a theological
seminary by ourselves

...you and I are not about to promote the cause of Church
Vocations, by ourselves

...you and I are not about to build all the congregations
that need to be formed

...you and I are not about to pack our bag and go off to
India or to Africa, but we would like to see the
Lord's work done in those places, so we help as best we

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can by having somebody else do the research for us, and be the channels of our concern, and become the extension of our hand...and incidentally, that's a good way to think of the Church, as the extension of the hands of Jesus Christ. For in this world every single Christian may think of himself as a little Christ, in the sense that he is here doing the work that Jesus Christ would be doing. That's what it means to be a Christian, among other things.

And there are those who believe, and I think quite properly, that it's a valid interpretation that the Church is the extension of Christ, the extension of His ministry, and of His compassion. So therefore, if you think of the Church in this way, and if you want to think of our part of the Church in this way, think of the Lutheran Church in America, then, as the extension of the hand of Christ.

Since you think of 231 Madison Avenue as the place where some of the money goes, I challenge you to be bold enough, now, to accept this suggestion, that you think then of the Church as God the Great Spender. Follow Him around with your dollar in His hands. I dare you to think of the Church in this way. What do you suppose happens with it?

Last week when the New Jersey Synod met in convention....throughout the Church the thirty-two synods are meeting in convention -- the synods, the gathering of the congregations which are constituent parts of the three-million-member Lutheran Church in America. This past week the Maryland Synod met in Gettysburg. Your Pastors and Arthur Steinhorn officially represented you, and on Friday five other members joined us and were there for the sessions of the convention. Now that the convention is over, I say to myself, how do I appraise it? Well, in reality, a convention of Christians gathered together is simply

getting an account of stewardship - - trying to find out what's happened in the past year with what we've supposed to have been about, what we've done with what God gave us....and also thinking about what we're going to do with this Gospel in the year that lies ahead.

Now, since the sermon deals with the title Steward, let me talk with you very briefly (time is of the essence, of course), of what we've been doing now as members of the Lutheran Church in America, with this Gospel that God has entrusted into our keeping.

Well, we've said we ought to share it. We have a Board of American Missions that concerns itself with taking this Gospel and gathering Christians together in new places where they hadn't been formed before. The expression "population explosion" is not new to you. We have evidence of it around us. Do you know that within the past year, were we able to organize -- I think the figure is an exact one -- 57 new congregations. Please don't get excited about it, that is, don't get excited overmuch. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years ago we were able to organize one new congregation a week -- fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years ago we had 52 new congregations at the end of the year. This little advance isn't very impressive. It isn't too impressive when you recognize that this is a result of three million people - - 6,238 congregations.

You ought also to know that perhaps one out of every four of our congregations in one way or another has a relationship to the Board of American Missions, and the Board of American Missions has never been able to pay its way on its own. Several years ago we decided we'd borrow money so that we might have the ready cash which we were not making available. Tuck this fact away, quite incidentally, however, in some recess of your mind.....every hour of every day of

every day in the year we're paying \$110.00 just on the interest of the money that we've borrowed, to get congregations organized and to have a place of meeting.

Those who are in a position to pass such figures along to us tell us as they anticipate the population growth and development, that in the twenty-year period, they go back from 1965 to 1985 -- they expect that we'll have 57 million more people. That's quite a spurt. They also tell us that it's going to require, according to the present trend of church development, 60,000 new congregations to take care of this population growth over and above our existing churches. Now, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God, will we be equal to that need?

God has given us this Gospel, God has given us His Church. Now will we be providing leadership for His Church? It's been recorded that we'll be graduating about 250 theological students this year who will be going into the ministry, not all of them into the parish ministry. Impressed? Restrain your rejoicing. 250 -- from three million members! 250 -- from 6,238 congregations! Is this a rather salutary measure of our stewardship? -- what we're able to offer to the Church by way of pastoral leadership?

Do you want a still more sobering thing -- it will almost choke you spiritually. In my judgment one of the finest things the Church has ever known is the Diaconate, where the Church allows a woman to be married to the Church, with no strings attached -- to give herself completely as a veteran of the Cross. Out of our three million members, 6,238 congregations, I don't think we set aside three women last year, and consecrated them as deaconesses.

This Gospel that God has given to us is meant for the uttermost parts of

the earth....out of our three million members, 6,238 congregations, were we able to send abroad 40 last year as missionaries? - - as good stewards of what God gives us, in the harvesting of souls and the gathering of people into the Kingdom?

We hang our heads in shame.....last year the Maryland Synod, of which we are part, with two metropolitan areas representative of the population explosion, Baltimore and Washington...a synod which, as far as this congregation is concerned, has seen within the past ten years six or seven new congregations begun - - - this congregation is now being ringed by its second row of mission congregations within the past ten years. Yet despite this kind of thing, the Maryland Synod was not able to chalk one-half of one percent as an increase in growth over the previous year.

How are we handling those who do come to us in Christ's name? Are we sustaining them and keeping them in the Family of God? There is a denomination -- and this is not for your comfort, our record is not impressive -- but there is a denomination, perhaps the largest of all Protestant groups in the country, with heavy concentration in the South, that lists on its lapsed membership roll enough people, who if they were reclaimed, could start six thousand congregations of five hundred members each.

Sounds negative, of course it does. But it's still God's Church, and it's still His Gospel entrusted to us. And I am thrilled to tell you, as Pastor Naegele and I, if we were privileged to give you the information that we hold privy, of the exciting and thrilling things that are happening....of how there are those whose lives are being re-vitalized by this precious Gospel. I agree

100% with the President of our Church who says that he's allowed his soul to be sobered by the thought that maybe our concern ought not be so much with what percentage of the population is Christian as to what percentage of the total man, the individual, is Christian.

It's a thrilling thing, I tell you, to discover here in this congregation the greater percentage of the individual that's being offered to Jesus Christ, the new dimension that's come into some of your lives. It is happening. There is this thing of renewal - - it's at work in this place. If it shouldn't be happening in your life, don't permit yourself, then, to think that it's not happening in somebody else's. Despite everything else that I've said to you, it's still a thrilling time to be alive, and to witness for Jesus Christ. Into this glorious enterprise I invite you anew, that we might prove ourselves good stewards - - handlers, of the precious Gospel.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOOD SOLDIER"

Soon the series dealing with the names and titles given the early Christians will be concluded. Today's subject is "Good Soldier" and the text, Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the second chapter, it's the 3rd verse:

"Endure hardness, as a good soldier of
Jesus Christ."

Young men undoubtedly would rather give advice than seek it. And sometimes, unfortunately, old men, because of their frustrations and their disillusionment, can be silent when they ought to speak. Or it could be that in the wisdom of God, this is one reason why He allows some people to grow old, that perchance out of their age and their experience, they might be able to offer good counsel. For after all, who knows the road better than the man who has traveled it?

Paul, beloved missionary of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the older man. Timothy is the young man. Timothy was his favorite spiritual son. Paul could not keep quiet...he was in duty bound to speak. He did not hesitate. It may have been that Timothy did not seek his advice, but Timothy needed it.

Timothy, young as he was, had oversight of some churches. Second generation Christians were beginning to lack in their zeal. There was the growing trend of heresy, of division within the church. Timothy had come upon a hard time. Knowing all of this, his elder brother in the Faith gives him good words of counsel, good words of advice....."Endure hardship, Timothy" - - or as one

translator has it: "Take your share of hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Think for a moment what he might have said to Timothy.

...he might have said to Timothy, "Brother, you think you have problems - - let me tell you about mine." - - that might not have been of much help to Timothy.

...or he might have said to Timothy, "Well, this is the way the cookie crumbles, this is the way the ball bounces - - just go along as best you can, day by day."....that might have said something, but it wouldn't have said very much.

But out of his experience, Paul said to him, "Endure hardship - - take your share of it, and conduct yourself as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Strange, isn't it, that we've forgotten that kind of advice in our day. We've raised a generation of young people who always want it the easy way. We've reared a generation of young people, perhaps more so than any other generation in history, who expect things to be packaged for them, constantly feather-bedded. The word challenge is a word not readily recognized by those who are young. The word obedience all too often is something that belongs to another generation.

But this is not characteristic alone of those who are young. Unfortunately, it's also characteristic of those of us who are a bit older. And somewhere along the line even the Christian Church has failed to recognize a basic principle that she has a Master who exacts unqualified obedience from His subjects. Somewhere along the line we've allowed our religion to become a matter of convenience, doing only those things that we can do easily.

It was a wise man who once said to his daughter, when she was experiencing a measure of difficulty: "My dear, you'd get along better if at the very beginning you'd accept the premise that life can be difficult."

Richard Scott, of Antarctic fame, in a series of letters that he wrote to his wife from an expedition, expressed a concern for their son. And in one of his letters he said to her, "Whatever you do, bring him up hard! -- bring him up hard!" Out of his life and of his experience he knew the meaning of discipline, he knew the meaning of having to be made equal, each day, to something unusually difficult....."Bring him up hard!"

But we are a people who falsely allow ourselves to believe that somewhere God has labeled life an easy thing, and that somewhere it's to be expected that sooner or later we'll be able to deal with life on terms made easy. Well, that's one tag that God has never put on life....."I can arrange easy terms for you." Thomas Carlyle speaks to the deep need of every man when he says, "To live has always been a serious thing."

When you consider the basic concept of the Christian religion, it begins with a Master who had disciples, and who said to them, "Follow me." And from these disciples He exacted obedience and courage, and loyalty and sacrifice. I'm not underestimating the needs that some of you have to hear proclaimed that side of the Gospel -- notice what I said, "that side of the Gospel" that portrays a Christ who says, "Come unto me all ye who are weary and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." There are some of you who look forward to this single hour in God's House because this, in the course of the week, is the only measure of peace that some of you get.

But there is also the other side of the Gospel. The same Christ who said,

"Come unto me - - " also said:

"Now - - go! Go ye into all the world - - "

The same Christ who said, "Come" also said:

"Take up your cross, and follow me."

Now for the moment permit me to observe that we do hail Christ as the Prince of Peace, and we remember His words about the blessedness of the peace-makers. But this is not to suggest that the image of the soldier has nothing to say to us. Name the virtues that come first to mind when you think of a soldier: obedience....loyalty....courage....sacrifice

...little wonder then that Paul, while writing to Timothy, giving sound advice on Christian behavior, should urge him to conduct himself as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this sermon is not to locate for you the battlefield of your encounter, or to catalog for you the particular kind of evil that you may have to face. The purpose of this sermon is primarily to prod your conscience and to prick you into a measure of understanding that you have a Master who is calling you to engage in battle, to allow Him to equip you against the forces of evil, that there is a militant note in the Christian religion that has to be respected.

We have to be very careful what we do with our own thinking. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that a member of this congregation once upon a time took me to task for the way we worded in the MESSENGER the reference to those who depart this life in the Christian Faith? A man has to steel himself against almost any kind of thing that's thrown against him....and this was her criticism - - the very use of the words "Church Militant" - - as though this

were not being faithful to Jesus Christ, as though this were not exalting His role as the Price of Peace. You know how we say it:

"SAINT LUKE CHURCH marks the passing from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant . . . "

...and this person would have nothing to do, whatsoever, with the metaphor, or the figure of speech, that deals with militancy within the Christian religion.

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that there are some people who, if they had their way, would take from our hymnbooks the kind of hymn that you sang just before this sermon was about to be preached ("Stand Up For Jesus")... ...and they'd also remove such a hymn as 'Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war . . . "they'd also tear from the hymnal "The Son of God goes forth to war - - - who follows in His train?".....we have to be very careful what we do with this kind of thing.

For if Jesus Christ was anything at all, He was the personification of God's strength against the force of Evil, and He saw himself daily engaged in combat. Is this what the Christian Church is saying to you today? Do you at any time hear the clarion call of Christ, to arise and to follow Him as a good soldier?

I have never read a complete biography of the man, I only have this snatch and that snatch of historical reference to him, but he intrigues me and I'm fascinated by Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian revolutionary...the man with warrior's blood coursing through his veins, who did perhaps more than any other person in his day, perhaps more than any man in the last several generations of Italian history to do something for his people as a nation. Once in the thick of battle when he saw his beloved Rome about to fall, in an apparent moment of defeat, turned around to any man who would hear his voice and he said, "Let

those who wish to continue the war against the stranger come with me. I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions. I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles, death."

...and honestly, there were those who heard him, there were those who followed him. He rallied the great cause.

Beloved, I tell you, the Christian Church has always been saying something like this, but her people have not always heard. When the Church has been faithful to her task, she's always been giving battle orders. But for this reason or for that reason we've allowed a group within the Church to become spectators. No battle was ever won by a spectator. No battle was ever really won because a group was perfectly content to let somebody else do all the fighting. By this time you ought to allow the truth of this sermon to sink very deeply into the conscience of your own soul, especially when you deal with such key words as:

OBEDIENCE - LOYALTY - COURAGE - SACRIFICE

Would you permit me to tell you with all candor that maybe the word that best described most of us is convenience. We send our letters Heavenward, and sign them, "Conveniently yours," "I'll follow you, Jesus Christ, as long as it's convenient"..... "I'll support the program of the Church as long as it's convenient"..... "I'll assume my rightful obligation as long as it's convenient." Can you imagine any force on the field of battle getting very far as long as it responded to the Commander-in-chief by saying, "Count on me, as long as it meets my convenience." ?

I suppose those of us who either have been or are parents of teenagers feel this more keenly than anything else, that there's something wrong with

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all the energy that characterizes our young people. We haven't harnessed it aright. Maybe there's something wrong with us, that we haven't challenged them enough. Thomas Carlyle, to quote him again, said that we will never get very far by flattering our appetites and any religion that's ever to gain followers must appeal to the heroic in men. Maybe the fault could lie -- maybe the fault could lie with them. Permissiveness is a key word in their vocabulary....."I don't have to if I don't want to." Where would any commander of troops get if that were the order of the day?

Maybe somewhere in the fabric of our society we've got to get back to the key word OBEEDIENCE -- the kind of obedience that doesn't question, the kind of obedience that's born out of trust and respect for the commander-in-charge -- the kind of obedience that's born just because society needs it, needs the basic principle of obedience.

If you've ever served in the Coast Guard you know this.....a few years ago, off the coast of New England, a liner was wrecked on a reef. The Coast Guard went to the rescue under the captaincy of an old man. There were some young men with him in the crew. One of the young men, seeing the situation presented to them, turned a white face to the captain, "Sir," he said, "The wind is off-shore, and the tide is running out....of course we can go out, but what good will it do? -- against the wind and the tide we cannot come back."

.....all the captain said was, "Launch the boat! We have to go out.....we don't have to come back."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IMITATORS"

The weeks have passed ever so quickly since last September we began this sermon series dealing with names and titles given to the early Christians. Today, of all things, when we especially invite those members of our parish and their friends who are being graduated from area high schools to attend what we might refer to as a Saint Luke "Baccalaureate," the sermon designated in the series bears the title, "Imitators." And the text, from Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians, his First Letter, the first chapter, portions of the 6th and 7th verses:

"And ye became imitators of us, and of the
Lord.....so that you were examples to
all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia."

In all likelihood I suggest to you that if the Apostle Paul were being considered as the pastor of any number of different congregations in the United States, they might hear him once, but he might not be invited back again and again. For there are those who when they heard the Apostle Paul preach, they branded him conceited. He seemed always to be talking about himself; that is, at least that's the way he appeared to people who never allowed him to finish his sentence, or who brought to him some pre-conceived notion of what they thought this man was who said he was a brand new man in Jesus Christ.

We ought always to be fair with any man, and we ought to give him a chance to finish his sentence, and we ought to allow ourselves more than one exposure. Look what might have happened if you were hearing the Apostle Paul for the first time. He was the kind of man who said:

"I can do all things - - "imagine a man talking like

that! If that isn't conceit, what is?

...but give the man a chance to finish the sentence....he said:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Or there was the time he said:

"I live - - -"as much as to imply, "I've found
the answer - - I've got everything that life was ever
meant to give - - I live!"

...but let a man finish his sentence.....he said:

"I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

Well, you might shy away from him because at first blush you'd call him conceited.

If you didn't shy away from him for that reason, you might shy away from him because you'd call him self-confident - - ah, take away that descriptive "self" - - just call him confident. Any man who can say, "I can do anything -- I can do everything", granted you allow him to say, "I can do it through Jesus Christ".....or any man who says, "I live," as though to say, "I have the perfect answer to life" -- now we call him entirely too confident, even though he says, "I live in Christ".....because maybe in the inner recesses of our mind we resent the fact that there could be somebody who could have so great measure of confidence, whose experience in Jesus Christ is so valid, without any hesitation and with the clarity of a good conviction to be able to say, "I know what I'm talking about, and I know the fact of God in my life as revealed in Jesus Christ."

Well, maybe you might take him in his stride, or in your stride, up to this point, as you allow him to finish his sentence:

"I can do all things through Christ"

"I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me"

...but what are you going to do now, when you come to this text -- and this is only one of several texts that could be considered today. It seemed to have been a favorite expression of his, in which he was so bold as to say, "Imitate me." If you had a preacher in this pulpit saying that, you'd take him to task at once, and if you didn't walk out before the sermon was finished, you might ask for a conference on Monday morning, in which you would directly confront him and say, "What do you mean, setting yourself up as a standard for imitation!"

Do I have to convince you that every single one of us is an imitator? It begins in the days of our childhood, and the child in man is never completely lost. There's something of the child in every man. Even from our very early days we begin to -- shall we use the expression, mimic-- reflect? -- mirror? -- the patterns to which we had been exposed. A woman, perhaps married fifteen years to a man, may with just cause say to him, "I'd just as well if you didn't traffic with those fellows. Every time you have been with them you bring back into our home the kind of language that they use, and their attitudes." Consciously or unconsciously, we're always reflecting, in one way or another, the things to which we are exposed. And if you want a definition of your own life, whether you care to accept it or not, to a degree each one of us -- each one of us, is the sum total of all the forces to which we have been exposed in life. We are the accumulation of the impressions made upon us, and to a degree we go on reflecting them in our life.

Imitation is a fact of life. And it's not necessarily bad! Who knows but what in the mind of God it's good? For there are those who tell us that this is one reason why in God's plan for man He instituted the family, not sim-

ply that a child should have certain physical needs cared for, but that a child as it grows and develops might have someone within a closely-knit company who would set before the child a pattern for behavior. And so effective is this pattern for behavior that you ask any pastor who has been in a congregation long enough to confirm those whom he has baptized, and to marry those whom he has confirmed, and he will be able to tell you that in all likelihood every now and then he sees reflected in the lives of those who are young the patterns of behavior of their parents and of their elders. That's one reason why sometimes you shock us so much, because we discover how much you are like us.

The Apostle Paul used the figure of speech that the Christian should be an imitator. Now specifically with the text. There is trouble in Thessalonica. The church was not progressing as it ought to be progressing. The devout and truly-committed church leaders were greatly concerned. They'd gotten word to Paul, the great apostle, as much as to say, "What word can you give us? Isn't there some message that you have to speak that will help us in our time of trouble?" And of all things, the Apostle Paul gives them this prescription: he says, "Imitate me - - - imitate us."

A man must have something to be able to talk like that. A man must be certain that the standard that he's going to hold up for somebody else can be trusted. Well it so happens the Apostle Paul was that kind of man. He was that completely Christ-committed, that without any hesitation he could say, "You can use me as an example."

You ought to be able to understand this. There's the story of a man who ran a very successful business but he had to be away from it for a period of

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months. So he said to his eldest son, "I'm going away -- the business is in your hands while I'm gone." When he came back, much to his delight, everything moving along splendidly! And the father said to his eldest son, "how were you able to manage? Didn't you have any problems?" And the eldest son replied to his father, "Of course I had problems. But every time I had to handle a problem I said to myself, if Dad were here, how would he handle this?if Dad were here, what would he do?" Whether he knew it or not, he was imitating his father, and his father had set before him such a valid example that it could be trusted.

Now the Apostle Paul is saying to these Christians in Thessalonica: "You have your problems - - you want to help solve them? Then follow the pattern that I would set before you."

Don't be afraid of this thing of using other people as a pattern. Whether we do it consciously or whether we do it unconsciously, we're going to do it. I challenge you therefore, as your Pastor, those of you whom we honor now: to set before yourself a good example after whom you can pattern, a good example for imitation.....

....I encourage you to become acquainted with the greats of every generation.....I encourage you to read biography -- the gallant souls of men who in their time of trial remained faithful, even as the hymn that we just sang reflected such a mood and such a temper....

....become conversant with those heroes of the Bible, men through whom God was able to work....and to this very day we go on naming our children after them, hoping that perhaps that even in the use of a name they might reflect in their own lives the qualities of these

people....

...you've heard me tell you about the man over in the slums of London, who had been brought to Jesus Christ by a man whose name was Quinton Hoag. Quinton Hoag went out of the man's life -- he never saw him again....but every now and then that man was tempted to slide back into his previous pattern of behavior, and he said: "Every time I was tempted to do it, I took out of my wallet this old picture -- look how it's wrinkled and worn! -- old 'Q.H.' as we affectionately called him -- and then I reminded myself of his pattern in Christ."

...you young women, I encourage you to take as your example, the one after whom you would imitate, the mother of our Lord -- Mary by name, whose life was so pure and so chaste that one day God chose her, even to set before His Son a pattern of earthly behavior, of pure devotion, of integrity of soul and of spirit....

....is it too much for me to say to you who are young men that you take as your pattern for behavior, that you imitate a man like Joseph -- who looked with true affection and respect upon a maiden pure, and who so ordered his life in the presence of Jesus Christ that one day when Jesus was asked to talk about God, He could not use any finer figure of speech than the term 'Father'.

Imitate such.

But it's a pathetic thing that across the face of this nation so often

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the imitation does not come from the Scriptures, does not come from the gallant souls who have written history for us, but stems from Hollywood, or even so much, shall I say, temporarily your pattern for behavior could be one of several who said, "I'm more popular than Jesus Christ." Take heed how you take to yourself a pattern for your behavior. The Apostle Paul was so committed to Christ that he could set himself up as a pattern to somebody else.

Now the sermon passes very quickly to where the sermon ought to have begun. You take as your pattern not only the Lord's servant, but you take the Lord himself. You can take the word of Jesus Christ for it:

"Come after me."

...what does that mean if it doesn't mean "Become a follower of me."....what does it mean if it doesn't mean, "Imitate me." In I Peter you can read for yourself, "He has set before us an example, that we should follow in his steps." Of all the people on the face of the earth we Christians are the most fortunate. We are not the only religious people. But only in the Christian religion do you have one who came as a Saviour, who also said:

"Follow me."

...who set before us an example.

I who am old enough to be your father and then some, let me encourage you to take as your example the Lord Jesus Christ. I have no patience with those who say He's dull and He's uninteresting and unexciting. You may have your moments when you think that He's drab, dull and unexciting...but would you believe me if I were to tell you that this is one reason why they killed Him! - - - because He was a dynamic personality! - - - because He was exciting, and He turned their values and their world upside-down...and they couldn't

stand Him because He was imitating God....and I use the term with all the reverence and respect that becomes it. When I say He was imitating God, He was giving us God-in-the-flesh, God-before-us. If you don't believe it now, some day you will, because history has a way of proving that He's as exciting as all that!

I stand in awe in your presence....I recall the days of our years together

...I recall how by assignment under God I placed my hand in blessing upon your head, confirmed you in the Faith, and heard your promise to follow Jesus Christ.....

...I remember how I gave you your first Communion -- gave you Jesus Christ....

...I recall how on occasion I talked with some of your parents and have known of their continuing concern for your spiritual integrity....

I stand in awe, stand in awe because of what by the grace of God you have to offer and what the world needs most....

Keep constantly before you a pattern for behavior no less than Jesus Christ himself.

I wish that some day one of you could write the book that some of us read in our impressionable years, written by a preacher, no less, called, "In His Steps." There are those who took it as a guide for their life, always asking themselves, "What would Jesus do? -- -- what would Jesus have me do?"

My friend, if you think this sermon is old-fashioned, fret no longer. Life itself will prove the integrity of what I've told you.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE APPROVED"

The text, from the last chapter of the Letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans; it's the 10th verse, the 16th chapter:

"Salute Apelles approved in Christ - -"

It's an extraordinary thing that the Apostle Paul is doing as he writes this letter to the Christians at Rome. It's one of his great epistles. But now when he comes to the last chapter, it's as though he's been completely carried away as he thinks of the parade of personalities that comes to his mind. It's almost like a preacher who has become so enthusiastic about his subject that he doesn't know where to stop. That's the kind of impression that you get when you come now to this last chapter in Paul's Letter to the Romans, because in this last chapter he's mentioning at least some twenty people by name, and he has something almost distinctive to say about each of them.

It's the kind of a thing, I suppose, if this preacher this morning were preaching a farewell sermon, and he were carried away with the wonderful things that he's been experiencing here in the life of this congregation. And if perhaps as his sermon came to a conclusion, he left the pulpit, and he walked down the aisle, and then he stood at each seat and he looked into the faces of people in each section, and then he named you by name and he said something very precious, a qualifying thing about you.....

...yes, I remember, I remember when you were in the New Member Group -- I remember the questions that you asked -- I remember even then the indi-

cation that you gave of true commitment to
Jesus Christ....

..and then perhaps walking down to the next seat, and say....

...ah, yes, yours was the precious family
that came so regularly Sunday after Sunday,
and you had in the same seat with you the
children, as you set before them the good
example of the family pew....

...and then when he went to the next section, and he stopped at this person
and he stopped at that person, and in each case, some mark of distinction
that could be said.

Well, that's the kind of thing that Paul is doing here in this last
chapter, as he's writing to the Christians at Rome, when certain people who
have a true mark of distinction about them in the Christian religion become
worthy of his special attention.

Paul was the kind of man, I presume, who never forgot a face, the kind
of man who never forgot a name. And this was true for him because he loved
people so genuinely; and whatever was characteristic of them in their Chris-
tian commitment made an impression upon him. So, now, when he writes this
letter, here's this parade of names, this parade of personalities, and each
of them with a kind of mark of distinction. You can read it for yourself.

The text, now, singles out one of them. It's the 10th verse, and even
only a portion of it, because almost breathlessly he went on to name some-
body else:

"Now salute Apelles for me - - " ...how does he refer
to him? - - - "Greet Apelles for me, approved in Christ." That was this man's

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mark of distinction, because as the writer of the letter thought of him, he's thought of him as a man who had met one test after another in his Christian experience and had come through triumphantly....a man who, as far as the Apostle Paul was concerned, in the final hour there'd be no question about him, he'd be approved, approved in Christ.

Now as this sermon series comes to an end -- it was last September when we began, a series dealing with the names and the titles given the early Christians -- it's significant that this, the final sermon in the series, should be designated as "The Approved," because this, now, is the mark of distinction....this, now, is the expression of our ultimate in our Christian practice and behavior, that one day each of us should have God look upon us and say: "You pass -- you've met the test! I put upon you the stamp of approval."

Tell me, my friend, what's happened to us? In the day of my fathers, and in the day of our fathers' fathers, much was made of this sort of thing, when children were impressed with the fact that there would be a time of judgment. We used to talk about it a great deal more than we talk about it now. We almost always gave to a youngster as a verse of Scripture that he should memorize and cherish, II Timothy 2:15 -- "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not be ashamed". There was a time when we seemed to have impressed upon them far more than we do today the fact that there would be a Judgment Day, that there would be a time come when God himself in Christ would draw a line, and on one side would be the accepted and the approved....and on the other side would be the rejected. And there were those who ordered their lives by so great motiva-

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tion that they would so live that one day they could hear the Great Judge say unto them....."Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of Eternal Life." Where, now, is such motivation today, that those who are young should so order their lives that ultimately they would deserve, and then use the figure of speech, "the smile of God's approval" -- and eternally so.

Of all the titles with which we've dealt, we come now to the last in the series, which should be for us ultimately the mark of distinction - - - APPROVED. From the Greek there's a word dokimos. It indicates what I've already mentioned. The word itself implies that a man should go through a period of testing, and after that period he would be declared accepted and approved. It's used ever so often in the New Testament. It's part of Paul's vocabulary. In his 14th chapter in this Letter to the Romans he says something about a man so serving Christ that he should be acceptable to God, and approved.

What, now, is that reference? That reference specifically is to a man becoming vitally interested in the needs of other people. And as he has a concern for a brother, God says, "This man is acceptable with me."

Let me say quite parenthetically now, it may not be given to any one of us to know exactly what may be our condition in the time of Judgment. I'm not so sure any one of us will ever know until that time comes. But we have a Saviour, we have Jesus Christ who has come to us and who has given us certain guidelines which become a measure of assurance to those of us who are persevering in the course of this life, that

might keep us on the way that ultimately we might hear God say to us,

"You are approved."

Now, what are these guidelines? Well, here's one that's indicated by this text, in the 14th chapter of Romans Paul is talking about a man who so orders his life that he is meeting a need in somebody else's life, and is so ordering his life that his own conduct does not become a stumbling block to somebody else! Now this kind of living is acceptable with God. It was Martin Luther who told us "Herewith know we that the birth of Jesus Christ is made effective in us, if we take unto ourselves the need of a brother." How fortunate we are that we should be given such a guideline.

If you want to know how much of a measure you have of God's favor, then simply put yourself to this acid test and ascertain as best you can how much love you have in your heart for somebody else. If I were an artist painting a picture of Heaven, and I would see a single soul approaching the gate....here again, using this imagery, I think the gate would open most readily for that man who could turn around and see behind him some other person who had been made strong, who had been lifted up, who has been sustained as a weary pilgrim of life, following in his footsteps. While it may be true that each of us stands alone in the time of Judgment, each of us will be judged according to his influence for good upon the lives of other people. This is a man who is approved, approved in Christ.

I give this to you on good authority. It was our Blessed Lord who, in speaking a parable of judgment, said, "I was hungry...I was thirsty...I was naked...I was sick...I was in prison...I was visited...I was given food, I was given drink, I was given clothing....."

" . . . Lord, when did we see you hungry . . . ?"

"Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me."

If you want to know whether or not one day you'll wear the smile of God's favor, if you want to know that you shall be classified as the approved, well here's one measuring rod for you.....how much of a measure of love possesses my heart in meeting the needs of other people?

Then the Apostle Paul, as he continues to use this word dokimos, indicates that it belongs to a person who, under any condition, reflects the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. Here's a surprising text for you...in I Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 19th verse, he's talking about the fact that within a Christian family there should be factions, within a Christian congregation there could be divisions....the thing that some of us despise even as the face of evil itself. But the Apostle Paul says, this could happen, that there could be in congregations trouble-makers -- that there could be within a congregation those who have partnership in strife. Now, says the Apostle Paul, speaking of this word dokimos, speaking of this word approved - - - "It belongs to those who remain firm in the Faith, and when all things reflect something of the mind and the mood and the spirit of Jesus Christ. . . . " This man wears the mark of God's approval, who even in the time of strife and strain and stress will not allow himself to have hostile feelings, will not allow himself to look upon another with hatred, and division, but in all things reflects the mind of truth and the spirit of love, which is the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, for the Christian, whenever a time of testing should come, he should look upon it as an opportunity to reflect something of the mind and spirit of Christ. Instead of running away from a problem he should persevere with patience, reflecting the mind and spirit of Jesus. James, not Paul now, but James, in the letter that he wrote, even in his first chapter, says, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, who has stood the test. He will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him."

If you want to be sure that one day you might merit God's approval, and I use that word merit advisedly, but if you want to be sure that one day you will be given the smile of God's approval, then simply, my friend, stick to the battle, face the conflict of life. Do not run away from its burden. Wasn't it Napoleon who maintained that the real test of a troop of soldiers was how they fought when they were hungry, when they were tired, and when they were cold. Courage, then, we should say to ourselves, when the difficult days come upon us, for they are the times of testing, and to borrow a figure of speech from Winston Churchill, could become our "shining hour."

Isn't there that figure of speech in the New Testament itself, where the reference is made to "those who continue with me in great tribulation." Read in Revelation that wonderful chapter, when "the saints come marching in" as it were, and every one out of great tribulation. I'm not so sure but what this can be said - - to every single one of us will come a time of testing, in one way or another...vastly different for you, perhaps than it might be for me. But in the final hour, the word of approval will be given to him who by the grace of God has persevered.

Maybe you didn't notice it, but one of the most fascinating and intriguing things to happen within the past year has been Francis Chichester's

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circling the globe in his tiny yacht, his tiny craft I suppose I should say, the Cypsy Moth. The Britisher, who at 65 years of age -- take note of that, any who are young and who pooh-pooh the virility and adventurous spirit of age - - - at 65 years of age, all by himself, spends 200 days on this craft and circles the globe, everything depending upon his own arms, his own mind, even as God has given him so great skill. And when I read about him I thought of all the winds that came against him....no single day was ever ordered for him and for him alone. But with his tiny craft he could circle the globe, he could control those sails that he might be able to work for good, even in evil wind.

This is what the Christian is meant to do in life. With all the forces that may array against us - - "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord." Courage, then, my friend, with whatever may lie ahead for you. The thing God wants most to say to you now and in the time of Judgment:

"Well done! I give you the stamp of approval."

What a precious thing if now, at this moment, I left the pulpit and I walked down this aisle, and I stopped at each one of you, and I should be able to greet you in the spirit of the Apostle Paul.....

Approved.....

Approved.....

Approved.....in Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

July 2, 1967

"WITHOUT A WORD"

The sermon bearing the title, "Without A Word" is based upon the Epistle for the day; and the text, the 3rd chapter of Peter's First Letter, and it's the 1st verses:

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may be won without a word by your reverent behavior."

It has never been a easy thing to be a Christian. Or is it? Have done with the notion, I suggest for the moment at least, that a person comes very easily into the practice of the Christian religion. As an example, allow me to recall for you the kind of thing that that man Peter is writing about in the First Letter that he wrote.

It had come to his attention that there were women who had turned their back upon their husband's religion and they had embraced faith in Jesus Christ. This was a great and noble step for a woman to take. If you read the history of those days you will learn very readily that a woman was never allowed to do anything independently, that is as a rule of something, that is something that can be said. She was treated so much as a possession and only as a possession. She was never allowed to think for herself. She was seldom if ever allowed to go out in public by herself. Any decision, no matter what it was, was made by her husband.

Then there were those who came bringing the good news of Jesus Christ. However it may have been that these women heard about Jesus Christ, there were

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those who when they heard were under conviction, they could not keep themselves from expressing their faith in Jesus. And so every now and then you had a woman bold enough to say, "No matter what the religion may be of my husband, I must declare myself as a Christian."

Now once she had taken this step she had all kinds of problems on her hand.....

...how, now, might her husband treat her when she expressed so great independence?

....how, now, could she go on living with him who did not know so great blessing that she had come to know? - - and particularly if she is to believe now that there is no other name under Heaven whereby we must be saved? What do you do when you go on living with a man who has yet to profess faith in Jesus Christ?

One of the tragic things about religion is that sometimes we come to divisive element. Now this was the problem that some of these women had on their hands.

When you read the pages of the New Testament you are convinced of the fact that idealists as these preachers were who spread the good news about Jesus Christ, they were also realists, and they fully understood that life had to be lived within the context of the present world. And so you get a man like Peter giving such practical advice to a woman who had come to know such great joy, that Jesus is her Saviour, and that until a person claims Jesus Christ as Saviour they have yet to know life's greatest blessing.

So now, what does he say to the woman?

Well, he doesn't say: "Nag him."

He doesn't say: "Every time you have a chance, pin him, put him
down, make him listen to you."

...he doesn't give any kind of advice like that at all.

He doesn't say to these women: "Try and figure out all the wonderful
arguments that you can give and then engage your
husband in conversation and make him listen to
what you have to say."

Nor does Peter say to her or to these groups of women:

"Why don't you just say to your husband, one
religion is as good as any other religion...don't
argue. Just believe that he has his way, you have
your way, and his way without Jesus Christ is just
as good as your way with Jesus Christ . . . "

...well, that's one thing that Peter could never say.

Of all the things Peter did not say, these are the things to be included:

...he didn't tell her to argue

...he didn't tell her to nag

...he didn't tell her to lord it over her husband, as
though now she were so much more superior

But of all things, this is what he said,

"Go about your business, and without a word, set
before him your example, that perchance by your
behavior he might be won to Jesus Christ . . . "

....now that's exactly what he's saying -- without a word, go about your business -- so that by your chaste and reverent behavior he might be won to Jesus Christ.

Now I submit to you this morning, there are two ways of doing good, or hoping that good might be accomplished. One is by direct confrontation and by specifically ordering your life in order that good might be done, and sometimes you and I have to do it, by preaching, by teaching, by speaking. Make no mistake about it, there are times when certain things must be said, and sometimes in God's plan that's the only way that good may ever register in people's lives.

You know for yourself, I consider it my holy vocation in life to spend a great deal of my energy speaking, declaring the good thing in Jesus Christ. We spend a great deal of our time and energy here in Saint Luke Church in our Christian Education efforts, because we believe that there are some things that have to be spoken and some things that have to be declared. We gather together in groups, we have Bible study sessions, we have discussion groups, because we believe that sometimes there are things that have to be thought through. The Church has its theologians who think through systems of thought, that we might have our doctrines which remain as the guides by which we may pursue the wonderful blessings of the Christian religion. This is absolutely true, that there are times when things have to be thought through and things have to be declared and they must be spoken.....and good is accomplished thereby.

But there are also times when God sees fit to accomplish His good without so much the speaking of a single word! And this is the kind of advice

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now that Peter is giving these women, encouraging them to set before their husbands, and encouraging them to set before the whole world of unbelievers, a good example, so that they might see Christ not so much by what they say but so much by what they are. Oh, this golden strand runs through all that's been given to us in one way or another. Emerson, not so much perhaps thinking of this text, did not he say, "What you are speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you say."

This might smack of heresy, but sometimes I think if I had to take a risk I'd much rather risk my belief in the Christian religion on the good example rather than perhaps bank my case on a system of thought. I think I can give this to you on good authority. Francis of Assisi, one of God's noble souls....who would say that he was an impressive thinker? No one would ever categorize him as a theologian...no one perchance would give him credit as being a great preacher, as though he would win the world for Jesus Christ by what he had been able to say or what he had been able to formalize into a statement -- important as doctrine is. And yet the world remembers Francis of Assisi for his life, the manner by which he walked, perhaps more so than by what he did when he talked.

I used to tell you this, do you remember, how when Francis had gathered together some of his disciples, and he was preparing them for witnessing to Jesus Christ, and whenever he gathered them together he gave them to understand that this was their justification for existence, that God allows no man any life unless it is to glorify God. And so he kept telling them that they must be witnesses, they must declare God's grace and God's truth and God's love.

And they kept after him and saying, "When now can we go and preach?"

...when, now, can we declare this love and this truth of God?

...when will you take us into the village?"

And so one day he decided to take them into the village, and this little company of disciples walked behind him....and he would stop frequently to engage a beggar in conversation, or to do some gracious deed for a humble soul. That's how he spent the whole day, just doing some gracious thing for somebody. And this little group of disciples went around following the master.

And then when they got home, somewhat disappointed they said to their master, "But I thought you told us that this was the day when we were going to preach! -- this was the day you said when you would take us into the village, and said we would declare God's grace and God's love."

And the master simply turned and said, "But don't you understand? As we walked, we talked! As we did these things we declared God's grace and God's truth!"

It's always a good thing for a preacher to have at hand a treasured volume, the sermons of a master-of-the-pulpit. There are few men, very few indeed, who can be classified as masters-of-the-pulpit, either of the spoken or of the written word, and it behooves us, therefore, to read, and to sit at their feet. James Black was at one time one of Scotland's greatest preachers. He has an interesting sermon called "Hole In His Pocket;" and the sermon is an exposition of God's word and begins with an example of an old bachelor preacher who was absent-minded. And one day someone gave him a package of nasturtium seeds, and said, "Now come May, be sure to sow these in your garden around the manse. It might bring some beauty, that others might be

able to appreciate it."

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He tucked it into his pocket, which incidentally had a hole in it because he had put his pipe, while it was still hot, one time, and burned a hole in his pocket, absent-minded as he was. And that's where he tucked the package of nasturtium seeds. And every now and then he'd reach into his pocket and crinkle the paper of the package, and in doing so caused a hole to come into the package.....and as he went visiting throughout his parish, occasionally these nasturtium seeds would be dropped.

Weeks later you could tell exactly where he had been - - a bit of beauty shared here and a bit of beauty shared there....unconsciously, perhaps without a word. So he brought something of the beauty and the grace which God intends for people's lives.

I don't know how it may be for you, but one of the most cherished verses in Scripture for me is this, a reference to Jesus Christ:

"He went about doing good."

...and if you were to read the Gospel account as though you had never read it for the first time, even though you may think of Jesus Christ as the great Preacher - - the greater record might be, and the larger account, a listing of the things that He did. There's an account of a miracle once, where virtue went out of Him and a woman was healed.....without so much as saying a word.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO HAVE A MIRACLE"

The sermon bearing the title "To Have A Miracle" is based upon the Gospel for the day; and the text, the 5th verse of the 8th chapter of Mark:

"And he asked them, How many loaves do you have? . . ."

The proverbial division of all people into two groups, for the purpose of this sermon at least, puts them into these two categories: those who believe in miracles - - - those who do not believe in miracles. Maybe when it's all said and done, the greater part of us are listed in the former category. For whether we believe in miracles or not, according to the New Testament understanding, yet as far as a real reading of life is concerned, many of us go on, day after day, having confronted an imponderable - - we go on day after day, hoping that somehow "a miracle" will happen....so that a situation that has become worse may eventually become corrected, fully improved. You and I have a way of going through life expecting miracles.

I do not hesitate to tell you that I shall be listed among those who do believe in miracles. You would expect me to say that, wouldn't you? At least you should. Because Sunday after Sunday when I come to this sacred desk and have in front of me the Good Book - - - what is the Good Book, if for this moment at least, but an accounting of the marvelous acts of God.... and every now and then, on this page and on that page, we get this account of how His hand intervened, and how His hand gave us a miracle. The New Testament is a recital, every now and then, of what happens when God takes

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over, when God's capability and His compassion are allowed to have their way. So I tell you, quite easily, I do believe in miracles. Not to believe in miracles is not to believe in God! -- or not to believe in miracles is to minimize the power and the purpose of God at work in His world.

There's another reason why I believe in miracles. Not just because of what I have read in the Good Book, but because of the evidence that some of you have given to me. Some of you constitute Exhibit A of the transformation of personality, the conversion of a soul, the changed life. Oh, you might say that there were people who were praying for you, you might say that there were those who were constantly encouraging you, setting before you a good example. But after we've seen all of this in the background, the fact remains that you, my friend, constitute something no less than a miracle.

If I were to turn this service at this precise moment into an old-fashioned testimonial meeting, if I were to say, "Come now, those of you who know the power of God at work in your life -- the transforming power of God -- stand up!" Reluctantly, here and there there might be a person who would stand up and say, "It happened! -- and I clearly call it the Hand of God."or someone may say, "I don't know that it's happened in me, but I can lead you to someone where it has happened, I can tell you the story of his life, I can tell you the transformation that did occur -- and there's no other name for it except miracle."

Well, to set the record straight this morning, there is a great deal of confusion about miracles. Not many of us fully understand them, even

pretend to understand them, or honestly, should we say that we understand them? Who can say that he fully understands God? And to have a miracle you must have God.

We say to ourselves, we who are Christian, we cherish the thought that in Christ Jesus all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell. Yet any man who has had a valid religious experience recognizes that the element of mystery remains. None of us can ever fully understand the plans of God, the way He works, what He does, how He does it.....nor should we be frightened by the thought. For we remain human - - God is divine. We are finite - - He is infinite.

But there are some things we can say to ourselves concerning miracles that might hold us in good stead. It might be helpful to recognize at once that while this eighth chapter in its beginning verses is an account of a miracle, we are not led to believe that miracles happened every day. We dare not believe that everywhere Jesus went He performed miracles. There were days when there was no such thing as a miracle. We ought to remember this, we who think that in our time of need we can turn to God, snap our fingers, and expect God to jump! It just doesn't happen today...and it just doesn't happen to everyone!

And for your comfort, my friend, you may wish to remember that the Scriptures shed light at this point, at least speak a helpful word, for some miracles were not performed because of their unbelief. I'd go so far as to say that some miracles are never performed because of their lack of compassion. Well this is one thing that we may want to say to ourselves....miracles

just didn't happen every day, but miracles did happen.

Now to get a miracle, what do you have to have? Am I making this too simple for you?

First off, to get a miracle you have to have a problem. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that there are some people who never know that problems exist? -- that there are some people who never recognize the somber truth that there are some things that they cannot handle by themselves! -- -- there are some people who would never know at all that a crisis is occurring, that a serious situation is at hand. Well if you want to have a miracle, you first have to recognize the problem.

It's surprising how many people go through life absolutely impervious to the fact that problems do exist. Maybe it's because we build in a kind of reserve against them, and we won't allow ourselves to become so sensitive that we're made aware of problems. Must I remind you that on this particular occasion it was no less than Jesus Christ himself who had to call to the attention of the disciples that a problem was at hand! In more than one account of this miracle, it's Jesus having compassion upon the multitude that brings to the attention of His followers that here is a need that ought to be met.

Maybe much of the Christian's role in society is to define and to call by name the problems that exist. Don't be overly troubled by those who bring problems to your attention; that is, if once they've brought a problem to your attention, they also help you to find the solution.

Now, this is another thing that has to be said when we talk about being made aware of problems -- this is the only thing that some people are aware of, then, the fact that a problem does exist, and every time they sit down they do nothing but talk about the problem....re-phrase it, re-state it. We do this

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all too frequently in committees -- we skirt the issue, simply by declaring it. This miracle would never have occurred if Jesus Christ would simply have said, "There's a bunch of hungry people at hand" -- and then the disciples come and say, "We heard you, Master, and isn't it too bad! -- -- wouldn't it be wonderful if something could be done?".....or even go so far as to say, " - something ought to be done."

The next thing that has to be said if you want to have a miracle....

...you recognize the problem -- you're convinced that it
ought to be solved....

....then, bless your soul, you may recognize your incapability. And that's a salutary thing, because God never made any of us big enough to handle any problem by himself. So it's equally significant that once you recognize you have a problem on your hand, and that you might be incapable, you turn to God. And you can never have a miracle without God.

What occurred in the feeding of the four thousand and the five thousand happened because God remained the primary actor. Some wit has said, "Let's see....4,000 - 5,000 people....two fish, five barley loaves -- " -- clever arithmetically, he comes up with this kind of a statement: "That would mean about one-eighth of a crumb per person!" That isn't a miracle.

But when you can feed everybody, and everybody has enough, and you have remnants remaining that you can gather up into baskets, that is a miracle. The eighth-of-a-crumb apiece is simply a human answer to a problem, the way we would have done it, without God. But the miracle occurred when God was asked to take over.

Now, this has to be said too, when you consider this performance of a miracle -- whenever you look to God, don't you dare turn and go away, because you'll never see what's going to happen next. And what happens next is

that when you turn to God, God has a way of looking right at you. And when He does, He says, "How many loaves do you have?"

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that aside from the act of creation, I wonder if there is anything that God ever does all by Himself? Aside from the act of creation, is there anything that God ever does unaided, unassisted? He is forever looking around, isn't He, for human beings to serve as His agents, His channels, His instruments, His tools. Can I put it for you in this manner, that even in the act of Redemption, He looked around for a Mary, and a Joseph. So to have a miracle, turn to God....but remember first, now, that He's going to turn to you, and He's going to put the question: "How many loaves do you have?"

It's amazing how often you and I become blind to the little bit that we do have, and yet I tell you that God always has already given us enough by which to begin! As far as God is concerned, there is no such thing as an empty-handed creature of His. Why, He even brings us into a waiting world, a world that's waiting to give to us, a world that's waiting to fill our hearts with love, a world that's waiting to put into our hands what we need. So when God turns to us He knows full well that each of us already has something that we in turn can offer to Him. It may not be much, but it's always enough by which to begin.

When I first came to this congregation there was a woman who came with a problem, and she said to me, "Pastor, maybe I ought to remember what I already know, that I ought to see myself less a part of the problem and more a part of the answer." So with the problem on their hands, Jesus Christ turns and says, "How many loaves do you have?"

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If I could challenge you as your Pastor, I would in this way: that when you read the newspaper, we who live in this metropolitan area, that we find one article after another, on column after another, dealing with all the problems that exist in this area....might you be able to say to yourself, "What is it that God might be able to do -- through me?" One of the abiding joys that I experience as the Pastor of this congregation is in knowing that several years ago a family of this congregation drove through an area less than five minutes away from where you are right now, and as they drove through this area in Silver Spring, in Montgomery County, they saw the culturally and economically deprived and disadvantaged, and to themselves they said, "What can we do about it?" It wasn't enough simply to say, "God, You do something." They were realistic enough to know that God seldom if ever does anything unaided.

In the assessment of any problem that you may have...

...in your own family circle....in your personal relationships

....in your inter-group relationships....in your inter-
personal relationships.....

....as long as there are human beings there are going to be problems. And God may always be saying to you, "How many loaves do you have? - - what will you give up in order to help see that the problem is resolved?"

I'm fully aware of the fact that as far as the disciple group is concerned, as Mark recounts it, this might have been their lunch that they had. This is not John's account, where we look to a boy who gives up his lunch, but this is where Jesus turns to the disciples....and they might have reasoned to themselves, "Well, we came prepared, and we have a day's work to do once

this crowd has gotten out of our way....this is our lunch, and we need it."
...and they might have reasoned wisely and they might have reasoned well,
as far as they were concerned.

But this is not the ultimate standard of Christian behavior. Nothing has a right to be labeled "Christian" if it does not include the motivation that comes by compassion. We must have a concern for others as well. For those who know how to take care of themselves may call themselves God's children, but they are not the only ones who are God's children, The ill-prepared and the unready and the disadvantaged, whatever may be the reason, are also God's children. And God may look to one part of His family to take care of the other part of His family. And whatever we may have never has its rightful meaning until it's given over into Christ's hand. Your life, my friend, magnificent as you may think it is, never comes into its own until it's been put into the hand of Jesus Christ.

I want to close with a simple illustration about two boys, one younger, the other, of course, older. One day the younger was given a nickel. He couldn't wait until he went to the corner store to buy a nickel's-worth of pretzels. So he came with his pretzels....."Mine - - mine - -"

Naturally the older wanted some of the younger boy's pretzels. So early does the depravity of human nature take over the human soul...the younger, who had the pretzels, said, "No - - mine!" ...and he kept them to himself.

...his stomach wasn't quite large enough yet, that he could eat all of them at once, so he hid a remaining pretzel. But the oddest thing happened -- he forgot about the pretzel, that he called his, that he had hidden away. Weeks later he discovered it....moldy...stale...tasteless -- no flavor what-

soever.....

Whatever it is that God has given to us, when we refuse to share it with somebody else, it eventually loses its own value....completely.

....and Jesus Christ turned and simply said -- as the prelude to a miracle --

" . . how many loaves do you have? . . "

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"MORE THAN ONE WAY TO A MAN'S HEART"

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Before I announce the title of this sermon and its text, allow me to tell you at once the purpose of today's sermon. A wise man once said in a very simple way, that it wasn't so much the world that causes us so much problem as it is the people in the world.....a very simple statement, of course. But who among us has not lived long enough to know that our greater problem always lies in the realm of inter-personal relationships, whether it be within the family circle, whether it be at the office where you work, or whether it be in the congregation in which you may happen to have membership.....always this matter of learning how to get along with each other and how to appreciate one another as one ought to be appreciated.

The context from which the text is taken deals with Jesus Christ recruiting disciples, and how He went about it, and how He seemed to treat each one a bit differently than the other. The sermon for the day bears the title, "More Than One Way To A Man's Heart"; and the text, the first chapter of John, it's the 47th verse:

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said, Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile."

Men and women in every generation have sought to portray Jesus Christ on canvas. Quickly now, as I recall all that I've seen.....

...Jesus the Miracle-Worker -- even walking on the water

...Jesus the Great Preacher -- standing there addressing

the multitude in connection with the Sermon on the Mount

....Jesus the Friend of Little Children -- seated there
with hands outstretched, blessing children who
draw near to Him

...Jesus In the Supreme Act of Sacrifice -- the Crucifixion

...Jesus In the Moment of Victory -- the Ascension, or the
Empty Tomb in the Resurrection Garden

...Jesus The Man of Prayer

I have a suggestion for an artist. I have never seen it done, but the passage of Scripture inspires the notion. It will be rather unusual -- perhaps you'll not be inclined to accept it once it's mentioned to you....

....but a picture of Jesus Christ with a bunch of keys in His hand. It will be a symbolic interpretation of Christ, of course....."Jesus of The Keys." Each of these keys would be tagged...each would have a particular label.

Now let me tell you why I think this way. When Jesus went recruiting disciples as He sought to establish the Kingdom, He approached them in a variety of ways. They themselves represented a variety of temperament and personality -- no two of them alike! Yet He saw fit to challenge them, and to invite them to become co-workers in the Kingdom. It was never His intention that the Kingdom should be established just by His leadership, but rather His leadership through them. So He went looking for disciples.

Now, Lesson One in this chapter entitled "How To Get Along With Other People" -- Lesson One is simply this: they were not all made by the same mould; they were not all of the same stamp. One of the most fascinating chapters in

the New Testament could be re-written by any man who would start looking individually at any of the disciples and trying to assess and evaluate the temperament and the individuality that characterized this variety of personality studies.

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You may as well know it, some of them were not as likeable as others. Among the disciple band there might have been those that you would never have chosen to go along on a fishing expedition, or a vacation trip..... ..there are some, if you had your way, that you would never have invited to your home for dinner -- you just couldn't have stood the way they talked, or perhaps tried to dominate one conversation after another. And if you're a particular kind of a person, you could not have tolerated very easily the disciple among the group who had little if anything to say at any time!

They not only represented a variety, but because they were of a different mood and temperament, Jesus Christ approached each one in a different way. Some disciples He gained because He challenged them - - - "If any man wants to come after me, let him take up his cross . . . "

...some disciples He gained because He met a basic need which was for compassion and understanding and sympathy...some people came to Him because they heard Him say, once upon a time: "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . "

....some people He won because He rebuked them -- He forced them to see themselves for what they actually were, as against what they ought to be, and could, by the grace of God, become!

Are you with me? Do you see now why I would picture Jesus Christ with a

bunch of keys in His hand? Keys are used to unlock doors. Jesus Christ was here on earth unlocking the doors of men and women, seeking an entrance, and He'd reach for this key or He'd reach for that key on this occasion, as the need might warrant.....a variety of keys because He was dealing with a variety of temperament and personality.

Now let's go back again and look to the day when He went recruiting for disciples. Among the number that He gained ever so easily was a man named Philip. And Philip couldn't keep the wonderful story of Jesus Christ to himself, and in conversation he was talking to Nathanael about Jesus. Nathanael's immediate reaction was this: "Can any good come out of Nazareth?"not very complimentary and not very promising as a disciple, to have somebody say that about the Lord and the Master - - "Can any good come out of Nazareth?"

Well in this whole matter of inter-personal relationships, let's look at that just for a little while. Human as we are, we become guilty of this kind of thing, condemn or indict a man by virtue of his surroundings. It's one of the questions that we ask so easily....

...where do you come from?

....where did you live?

....where do you work?

.....where did you go to school?

...and then whatever judgment we already have of that situation, we immediately superimpose upon you. And many a man has been short-changed from the very beginning because he's been condemned -- by our judgment of his surroundings. Whatever the prejudice was that characterized Nathanael, he car-

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ried it over immediately to a man that he knew little about, except to say, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" In our whole area of inter-personal relationships, be careful, my friend, how you condemn a man before you've ever really had any confrontation.

Interesting now, how does Philip react? Nathanael says, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" Philip, bless his soul, he doesn't argue. It wouldn't have been of much use because there was a psychological block, for the moment at least, in Nathanael....Nathansel would never have heard! So with the wisdom that became him, Philip didn't argue at all. He simply said, "Why don't you come and see -- test Him for yourself -- experience a relationship with Jesus Christ." My friend, it's always a risk to experience a relationship. You could learn to like somebody! -- and this is one thing that some people don't want to do. They're much more secure in their prejudices.

So Nathanael comes along to meet Jesus Christ...Now get ready -- Jesus-with-the-keys. For which key will He reach, now, to unlock the heart of Nathanael, because Jesus, who is omniscient, knows exactly the frame of mind of Nathanael. Does Jesus Christ say, "I'll mark him off my book at once"? I'm inclined to think that every single man that the Master ever met constituted a challenge, because from the very beginning, if you please, every man was meant for Heaven.

So Jesus Christ looks for this possibility, and the key that He uses now to unlock the door of Nathanael, the man of the prior prejudice -- the key that He uses in this case you can call Praise. He had a kind of gracious word for Nathanael -- this man who at the very beginning short-changed Jesus

Christ -- the Master has a kind word for him. As he approaches He says:
"Look at him. He's really a man in whom there is no guile." So Jesus Christ
appeals to the better side of his nature, and starts moving from that point
on.

In this whole realm, now, of inter-personal relationships, take your cue,
my friend -- that's the point at which to begin: with the better side. Some
writer once said that a housewife might be more kindly disposed toward a
bowl or a vase of flowers when she's arranging a room for an expected guest,
and she's very careful to see that it gets just the right light and that the
better side of the flowers will be showing when the guest enters the room.
In our initial relationship with some people, are we willing to look at their
better side from the very beginning? Beloved in the Lord, this, too, becomes
the Gospel of Jesus Christ -- this, too, is part of God's Good News for us.
For if God in Christ were not to deal graciously and kindly with us, every
single one of us would be consigned forever to Hell!

Jesus had many keys. This is the key He saw fit to use to unlock the
heart of Nathanael. You have many keys, my friend, in your relationship with
other people. Sometimes you'll have to use the key that's labeled Rebuke --
the judgment of God has to come through you in your dealings with people.
Sometimes it has to be the key of Compassion, of Understanding. How often
do you use the key called Praise? It might work far more often than you'd
care to think! -- and sometimes it might be the only key that will unlock
the human heart.

I have a bunch of keys, maybe six or seven keys on the ring. Three or

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four of them are very much alike. And sometimes when I come to the Parson-
age at night, and maybe they've forgotten to keep the outside light burning,
I fumble in the darkness for the right key for the kitchen door, and I'm
never able to get in until I find the right key! In the darkness that has
come upon this world, you and I may go fumbling and making all kinds of
mistakes, and may have to try one key after another, but when God made us
God gave us the right key, if only we'd be willing to try again and again,
until it can be unlocked.

Please do not misunderstand me and read far more into this than ought
to be read into it. Unashamedly I do not deny the fact that I grew up in
the Sunday School where we sang Gospel hymns. Some of the truths of those
hymns remain in my heart to this very day. The tunes might have been miser-
able. I recall this stanza from one of the hymns - - maybe you'll recall
it, too.....

"Down in the human heart
Crushed by the Tempter,
Feelings lie buried
That Grace can restore.
Touched by a loving hand,
Wakened by kindness,
Chords that were silent
Can vibrate once more."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

August 13, 1967

"ON FACING IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS"

Diaries serve a useful purpose. Was it twenty years ago today, or was it twenty years ago next Sunday, that in the company of a group of people surveying post-war Europe we found ourselves in Czechoslovakia. We spent that Sunday afternoon visiting what had been a tiny town -- was it within a half-hour's drive from Prague -- the place...Lidice.

Does the name mean anything to you? If it doesn't, it ought to. Perhaps you'll be interested in a few details.

During the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Adolph Hitler had appointed Heydrich as the Right Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. The Czech people called him "Heydrich the Hangman." He was as much despised as it's possible for any human being to despise a fellow human being. Loyal Czech patriots who lived in Lidice swore that his death should come to pass....they succeeded in way-laying him as his car made a turn in the bend in the road.

....they went back to Lidice, presumably saying to themselves, "how long will it be until we're found out? What will be the nature of the reprisal?"this, at least, was the kind of thing that went through my mind as I stood there where once had been the town of Lidice.

You ought to know what the reprisal was. The successor of Heydrich came in. Thinking the killers of Heydrich had come from Lidice, they gathered together all the women and the children in front of a huge barn, where he had previously gathered together the men and the sons of Lidice. The order was issued....the men and the boys were shot down, and there they lay in cold blood. A mass grave was dug for them....and there they were buried. The women and the children were

carted away to concentration camps.

Then, systematically, every single building in the tiny town of Lidice was destroyed by fire. That his revenge would be complete and final, the Nazi order was that horses and plows would be brought in, and the debris from the conflagration would be turned underneath the earth...and in its place there would be a corn field. Lidice would be obliterated. That's exactly what happened.

And as I stood there trying to re-live that terrible night that they must have endured, or at least what they had to face, I tried to identify with those people who had killed Heydrich, who had plotted his death - - -

...the question of questions: shall we remain?

...will we be found out?

...ought we to run away?

Is there anything new under the sun? Significantly enough, there's a parallel in Scripture. Jeremiah recounts it for us.

Judea was being occupied by the Babylonians. The king of the Babylonians had appointed his own personal representative to govern Judea during the period of occupation. He, too, was hated and despised. And there were the loyal and faithful patriots who said, "We will kill him."

The Babylonian governor of Judea was assassinated. That handful of Jews, instrumental in so great a plot, must have said to themselves, "What shall we do? Shall we run away? Shall we escape? or shall we stay?"

Being devout men, presumably, they sought out the advice and the counsel of the man-of-God, Jeremiah by name. And they came to Jeremiah and they said,

"Jeremiah, tell us what we ought to do."

They of course wanted an immediate answer. This is always so prone to occur on our part -- in our time of distress -- "God, act now! -- today!"

Jeremiah says, "I'll have to have some time. I'll find out what the will of the Lord is for you. It may even take ten days."

After ten days they were gathered together, and then Jeremiah told them. But it wasn't what they wanted to hear. They had made up their mind that they would listen to what God had to say if it happened to be in agreement with what they believed in. They had hoped that God would say, "Run away!"...believing, perhaps, an old adage that

"He who fights and runs away
May live to fight another day"

Jeremiah said, "You're God's people."

...to all intents and purposes, Jeremiah was saying, "God has something to work through you, in this unpleasant situation. You don't run away. You stay where you are."

And now the text, written in the 42nd chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah, the 13th and the 14th verses:

"But if you say, 'We will not remain in this land,' disobeying the voice of the Lord your God and saying, 'No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there,' . . ."

Jeremiah knew full well what their heart's intention was. They were going to escape. They weren't going to remain in an intolerable situation. They would go where the grass would be greener, where no trumpet sound would call them to war, where there'd be no famine, no hunger for bread, and where they could dwell.

Jeremiah, seer of God's revelation, hearer of God's voice, and at the same time, keen student of human nature, says to the Judeans....

"Go ahead -- run away -- go down to Egypt.

But let me tell you one thing: everything that you seek to escape by running away will even come to you in Egypt."

Precisely! The human situation remains constant, anywhere and everywhere. All the ills that are about to beset us here you'll find two thousand miles away. God never promised us any kind of a Paradise this side of Heaven ever since what happened in the Garden of Eden.

But human as we are, we want to pack up our bags, we want to run away, we want to believe that somewhere else the situation would be better. Sometimes maybe yes, but not always. And sometimes God will allow you to be free from what seems to be intolerable situation, but on other occasions the word of the Lord is plain and the word of the Lord is clear....."Stay where you are.... ...stick it out....you are my people, and my purpose is to be fulfilled where you are."

This is not good news for most of us. We who are living off the fat of the land, we who enjoy the benefits of affluence, have gotten so conditioned that we want things nice. We're not conditioned to inconvenience; we're not conditioned to being annoyed or irritated. We are the nice oriented generation - - - that's what we are.

A student was once asked, here in America, "What do you want after you're graduated?" Note well the reply.

"I'd like a nice wife...a nice home.....a nice job."

"Nice"....."nice"....."nice"

...always the nice situation.

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But life isn't always nice. Conditions can change. Things can become nasty, things can become ugly. There is such a thing as the depravity of human nature which creates this nastiness and this ugliness, or at least helps to spawn it. What does God say to us? Well, through his prophet Jeremiah He says to us, at least, "Accept the fact of an inevitable situation." It's inevitable that evil may have its day; (you don't forget the crucifixion, do you).....it's inevitable that evil may have its day. You begin by accepting that fact. So, therefore, if that should be true, yea, verily, because it is true, don't go running away from situations that are not nice.

This is your Pastor's word of advice and counsel to any of us.

...you may discover that your marriage isn't working out nicely

-- well, you have no guarantee that the second wife,

or the second husband, will create any nicer situation.

...you're somewhat disturbed and vexed with the children that

you've reared, and you would to God that you were the

parents of some other children -- they're not turning out

nearly as nicely as you'd hoped.

...your job. You have reason to believe perhaps that if only

you had some other job, surrounded by some other people, it

would be a lot nicer.

...we who live in suburbia. We have the nicest situation on the

face of the earth....in the three and one-half weeks that

have come and gone since I went on my vacation I've been

delving into this whole matter of suburbia, reading book

after book, preparing a paper on "The Mission of the Church

in Suburbia." For most of us, we've arrived! This is our bit

of Paradise! We have a nice situation.

Then there is always the possibility of somebody else moving in, that may not make for a nice situation in our neighborhood. If only we could move out.

You can fill in the illustrations for yourself, they are endless.

What does God say to us? Very often He says, "Stay where you are. Stick it out. Learn to live with it." Oh, I should tell you this: that as far as life is concerned, there are only three things that we can really do with it.

We can rebel against life, whatever the situation may be, and revolt - - fight it. Some people do.

The second thing we can do, perhaps, is to resign. Expo-67 has much to be said in its favor. For some of us, perhaps the finest thing about Expo-67 is a series of creative films that are being shown....

"To Be Alive" - - an exceedingly precious thing

"We Are Young" - - youth speaking to us out of

their situation

"Labyrinth" - - creative tale of modern man.

In "We Are Young" I think it is, here is a very charming, lovely gal who goes off day after day to her day's work...the monotonous routine task of doing the same thing in the same way, of being caught up with the rat-race. And then in a very dramatic fashion, you find her saying one morning....

"Take a memo to the human race - - I RESIGN."

But it's not as simple as all that.

And the third possibility is that one becomes reconciled by God to his situation. And perhaps that is the second principle that Jeremiah has to think of in his advice --- "You stay where you are and you make the best of it by redeeming it....working creatively through it."

Maybe the most important thing in life isn't what happens to us but what we do to what happens to us. Maybe essentially a man has the opportunity to choose the fabric and the color of the fabric which constitutes the garment of his soul.

Ned Langford was an American who served in the Spanish-American War. He came home from that war with high hopes, all the dreams that he would think would be fulfilled. May I para-phrase it....

"a nice wife....a nice home.....a nice job...."

One day there was a fire in the neighborhood where he lived. He went to help somebody escape from the fire. He was badly seared.

In the medical examination the result was revealed that he had a condition not previously detected -- a leprous condition. He was sent away to an island for lepers.

He could have cursed against life, he could have cursed against God. He could have gone everywhere looking for a scapegoat. And one day on the island, he found a leprous child...orphaned....and from that moment on Ned Langford stayed where he was, met the situation creatively, brought a blessing into the life of the orphan child.....and there was meaning in his own existence.

You said the words too casually, my friend, words of our Blessed Lord Jesus, who knew the travail of life. He one day said to some people:

"Lo, I am with you always"

...that means, wherever you are. God says you ought to stay. He'll never allow you to stay there alone. In Him is our peace and in Him is our strength.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Introductory Words to the Sermon: "A MAN FOR OTHERS"
August 20, 1967

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Now about the sermon that's to be preached today. It's based upon the Gospel for the Day. You'll recognize it at once as the parable of The Good Samaritan. You ought to know what others have said about this story, that while it dramatizes the Jericho-Jerusalem road, which is typified as the Road of Life itself, you can find four groups.

First there is the group of people who cause other people to fall, the robbers.

Then there is the victimized. There are always those who become bruised and hurt, and are taken advantage of, on the highway of life.

Then there's a third group of people, who when they become aware of this fact, see no involvement whatsoever, and keep themselves detached.

As far as the Christian ethic is concerned, the Christian is to fall in the category of the fourth group, who when he sees people in need, identifies with them and ministers compassion.

Each of us has to decide what kind of traveler on the highway of Life he's going to become. This is one of the purposes to be served in the preaching of this sermon this day, from this pulpit.

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"A MAN FOR OTHERS"
(Luke 10:23-37)

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The parable of the Good Samaritan remains among the most unforgettable that Jesus ever told. It's recalled not only by Christians, but there are many people outside the Christian faith, who, while they may not recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, have a high regard for His teachings. And among the things that they remember that He taught is the ethic as indicated in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now as it continues to be included among the most unforgettable stories that He told, one can well afford to ask the question as he examines the story carefully, just why should this be so?

I would suggest that you note at once some of the unattractive elements in the story....some of the unattractive elements....

...no matter how you may look at it, at first blush the man who put the question to Jesus Christ doesn't appear as a very attractive person, honestly he doesn't. If you want the jargon of the day, he was a kind of needler, that's what he was. He was young; there was about him a certain degree of arrogance; you might even brand him an intellectual. He wasn't so sure that he had too much respect for religious authority. So lo and behold, looming upon the horizon of this man's life appears the Itinerant Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. The translation that I read for you as the Gospel for the day says that he even tried to figure out how he could trap Jesus; the old King James

version says "he came to tempt Jesus."

Now honestly, there isn't anything too attractive about a needler. Some of us revolt inwardly against the kind of person who comes to put us on the spot deliberately, to make us appear a fool, to somehow prove to other people that we can't be trusted, that what we are saying isn't valid.....and all of this to allow themselves to be seen in a better light. Well quite frankly, if you care to look at it this way, there isn't anything very attractive about the man who put the question, for a needler he was.

...In the second place, there isn't anything too attractive about a story that deals with a man who had been victimized. Who, now, wants to be told about the sordid and the miserable details of life? Yet why do we go on remembering the story of a man who in all of his unattractiveness, remains as a very important figure in the story -- wounded, half-dead -- perhaps there were those who honestly believed that he had no hope whatsoever for a new life....maimed body...there wasn't too much bath-taking, anyway, as it was, in Palestine. There isn't anything quite attractive -- there isn't anything very attractive about a bruised, broken body, which indicates the sordid and the miserable which can happen in life.

...Now when you turn to two other characters in the story, surely there isn't anything appealing about them...two men who when they came to where this fellow was, as Jesus tells the story,

deliberately passed by on the other side. You wouldn't hold them up as models of exemplary behavior. Down deep inside of us there's something rebels at the thought of a man passing by another man in need; and if there's anything that we do take seriously on occasion, at least, it's man's inhumanity to man...and isn't this a case of man's inhumanity to man? - - his gross indifference. What's attractive about that?

Yet the story continues to be told, and yet the story continues to be cherished. Maybe it's because inside each of us we like to believe that somewhere, somehow, somebody might come to us, if we should be victimized; a truth, all too revealing, to the uninhibited Sunday School boy, who when his teacher, having told the story of the Good Samaritan, trying to make perfectly plain why Jesus had told the story, thinking that she had gotten her point across, said to the class: "Now, what does the story teach us?".....and in very human, uninhibited fashion the boy immediately replied, "It simply says that when we are in trouble, other people ought to come and help us!"and that isn't the point of the story at all.

There's a subtle difference. The point of the story is that as a man, personifying the spirit of Jesus Christ, he should take the initiative to help other people; not that, having been victimized, he should wait for other people to come to him. We'll come back to this later.

Now, let's get back to the questioner. Granted he wasn't very attractive in our book, nonetheless, he's not to be ignored...because if you can't respect

the questioner, you can respect the question:

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Yet I would say to you, even Jesus Christ respected the questioner, because He took time to give a full and complete answer...not only to give the answer, but also somehow to speak to the deep need of the questioner himself.

I would like to think that the questioner might represent, here in the 20th century, our young, our rebellious, our questioning, our intellectual generation. That's how I'm inclined on occasion to categorize our young generation -- forever questioning religious authority....not, perchance that they question religion itself -- this they don't know, but what they may be really questioning is, Does religion have any meaning for me? And this is why they cannot be ignored, this is why they may be unattractive in their need, yet they could be posing serious questions, far more serious than they themselves may realize.

To the credit of the young man, he wasn't so much concerned as to the nature and the character and the quality of Eternal Life -- maybe he hadn't gotten that old. But being young, he's the activist -- "What should I do, if Eternal Life is going to be mine?" Well, whatever you do, know full well that Jesus Christ did pay attention to the questioner, because he happened to be asking a mighty serious question.

Now let's note the other people: the priest, and the Levite....unattractive because they passed by on the other side, and they passed by on the other side because they didn't want to see what they should have seen. They represent all those who presumably put blinders on their eyes -- "If I don't see, then I can't be held responsible for inaction."

Now, let's go again to the main point of the parable. Really, the question

isn't so much this: "Who is my neighbor?" as it is when it's re-phrased in this manner: "To whom can I be a neighbor?"and there's a subtle difference. One of the things that Christianity has to offer by way of all its efforts is the sense of community, a sense of neighborliness, a kind of identification with all people. This is why the story is so important. This is why man, whether he calls it by name or not, remembers the story -- because he was made for community. He was not made to be ignored, he was not made to be treated with indifference, he was not made to be victimized. He was made to be dealt with kindly, and you and I were meant to give compassion.

So in answer to the question: to whom then can I be a neighbor? First off, the parable reminds us that we must see the person to whom we are going to be the neighbor...we must see them. The priest and the Levite refused to see them. Now those of us who live in suburbia find this extremely difficult, to see a person. In any metropolitan area of which suburbia is a part, there is always the teeming mass. How can you be good to people in a mass? how can you love people generally?

Whenever I go back to my home town -- you've heard me tell you about it repeatedly, a town of three thousand people or less, as I knew it....

...only one main street, only one butcher shop, only one post office, only one or two grocery stores, only one fire house, only one school building -- elementary, junior high, senior high.....

...when you walked the streets of that small town you knew everyone, almost everyone, and you saw them face to face, and you had a name. Neighborliness meant something on that basis. But here, in our situation, who knows anyone by name, by face? It's an exaggeration, of course, but you know full well what I mean.

Yet the Christian ethic remains, and the Christian design for living has not been changed. There is no hope for us until we learn the meaning of neighborliness. This is why the story remains unforgettable. So somehow you and I must school ourselves to see a person, in the mass. And you begin at that point.

Then after you have seen a person, by the grace of God you may say to yourself, is there something I can do for him? How different this world would be, how different your home could be, how different the place where you work could be, if day after day after day you were ruled and motivated by the holy thought, "What can I do for you?"...what can I do for you?" - - - as though God sent you into this world to deal kindly with people.

Not far from my home town, in Benton, Pennsylvania, there was a man born whose name is known the world over because of his literacy program, Frank Laubach -- now an octogenarian and perhaps a little more. But what some people don't know about that man is this: that he's so God-conscious that when he's riding along in a bus or an airplane or a train, or seated in a terminal, he sits there in meditation, and then several words go through his mind as he looks at a person. He calls the divinely-inspired game CIHY -- Can I Help You?..can I help you? And when he tells people about this, we're surprised to discover the occasions of need that arise, and the opportunities which come to him, when he's so motivated and so inspired, just because he goes through life conscious of the fact that there is someone to whom he could be neighborly.

A number of years ago, I don't know exactly when, there was a workman involved in the task of welding a pipe in a trench. The ground collapsed.

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His helmet kept him from being smothered. But oddly enough, he discovered that his hand was free, was not covered. Desperately he kept moving his hand to grasp anything that he might be able to touch, if not to call attention to his plight. His hand grasped his torch, and he caused an arc to be formed....to no avail. It was still broad day-light, nobody saw it. Then the most unusual thing in this story occurred. One of his workmen, who had gone away from the job, felt strangely moved to go back to the site, he didn't know why. But when he got back he immediately saw what had happened and discovered the outstretched hand of his buddy. Being a sensitive man, he said later upon reflection, "It must have been that God sent me back."

You're not too sophisticated, are you, to accept this noble suggestion: why don't we say, as we go through life, that God sends us on our way, to look for something that we might correct, to look for someone that we might help. It might be a simpler thing than you might ever imagine, not nearly as dramatic as the rescue of a man entrenched.

Some twelve years ago, a father and a mother and their two sons came into the Silver Spring community. They came in mid-year. It meant the older of the two boys, finding himself in Eastern Junior High, a complete stranger. It was the first time that he had ever been uprooted. He was bewildered and he was confused. He almost hated the very sound of the name Silver Spring. And then one day, at Eastern Junior High, a boy happened to see him on the periphery. He simply went over to him and showed himself kindly, graciously. It made a tremendous difference, a tremendous difference.

Now the interesting thing is, that the great help that came to that boy, a teenager, came outside the walls of Saint Luke Church. It could have happened

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in the Luther League, it could have happened in the Sunday School. But when he reminds himself now of perhaps the most important single thrust that helped him make the adjustment, he remembers another kid who paid attention to him, kindly, quietly, confidently.

Now you're not forgetting that when Jesus told this story that deals with the tremendous theme of Eternal Life, He took his questioner outside of the synagogue and took him on the highway of Life, and He said, "Out there — that's where the stuff of Eternal Life is fashioned."

...and don't ever forget
that it was a man who got off from a donkey and went over to
a stranger, and showed him compassion.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Introductory Words to the Sermon: "GOD IN SLOW MOTION"
August 27, 1967

Now about the sermon. The theme of the sermon and the title are not necessarily the same. It's quite an assignment sometime for a preacher to decide what he's going to call his sermon. For your information, the sermon to be preached today is based upon the Gospel for the Day. It could carry this title, "God in Slow Motion."

Perchance as the sermon unfolds itself you'll see the justification for such a title. Now the basic theme of the sermon is the fact that God does not always act dramatically, and we who are impatient must remember this, that God takes His time to do certain things; and that perchance in the ordinary process of life, when we do not see it, God is still at work.

Church theologians used to use a term something like this: the prevenient grace of God -- meaning the grace of God that's at work in advance of a situation in which we're going to find ourselves.

There's also another kind of grace that's operative -- imperceptible grace.....God at work without our being made aware of it, but nonetheless it's God-at-work.

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"GOD IN SLOW MOTION"

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You can well afford to hear it again, my friend: God doesn't always act dramatically. Failure to appreciate this fact can cause us a great deal of trouble, because when we come to God believing that He can do anything, we allow ourselves to think that we have only to ask, and immediately the divine fingers snap! - and action occurs.

Presumably it all goes back to the time when we sat with a Sunday School teacher, and she unfolded for us the marvelous story of Creation, how it all began....

...and God said, let this happen, and it happened! - - one thing after another, just as God said....then there was the first day, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth and the sixth....and we permitted ourselves to think that it all happened suddenly, dramatically.

In the days of my childhood, in the days of my youth, that word evolution was a naughty word, and we never allowed it to have its rightful consideration, this whole matter of the evolutionary process. But be that as it may. Having read the account of Creation in the Book of Genesis, as a child I walked away, keeping in my mind an image of a God who seemed to snap His fingers, to speak a word, and things happened suddenly, immediately, dramatically.

Then there's this whole matter of seeing God as the miracle-worker. Any

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casual reading of the New Testament, the Gospel records in particular, introduces us to Jesus Christ going around performing miracles, and we're always impressed by the dynamic, we're always impressed by things done in the grand manner. So as we remember the Gospel record, this too is the lasting picture that we have of Jesus Christ, the miracle-worker. In some readings of the New Testament, and some readers of the New Testament, would allow us to believe that all that Jesus Christ did was to walk around, performing miracles.

Ah, I have to add quite quickly, lest I be misunderstood, all that God does falls in the realm of the miraculous, because it is the extension and the projection of His creative energy, and who among us can fully understand the mind of God? -- for the mind of man cannot fully understand. So anything that bears the stamp of God can rightly be recognized as the miraculous touch, no matter how it originates and no matter how it reaches its fulfillment. But then to think of Jesus Christ walking around always doing things dramaticallymaybe that's the word we ought to emphasize.

I must remind you that as you read the Gospel record, it was only on a rare occasion that He fed five thousand people. And you won't have to use all the fingers on one hand to count up the number of times He brought a dead person back to life. I have not tallied the entire record of the miracles that He performed as they are reported in Scripture -- sometime maybe I might want to do that. But haven't we been told by somebody that of all the miracles that occur in the New Testament, that is, the Gospel record in particular, we might be hard-pressed to average out one or two a week in the life of His ministry? We do ourselves a disservice if we permit ourselves to believe that He

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spent all of His time just going around giving a divine nod, and the miracle happened. This I can say to you, that it seems reasonable for me to believe, at least, that there are far greater hosts of people who did not know the benefit of His miraculous grace than those who did. This, too, it seems reasonable for me to believe, that He spent far more time preaching, teaching, cultivating and nurturing the disciples, and praying, than He did in the performance of miracles.

This is not to minimize His capability, nor is it intended to sell short the fact that He did see fit to work miracles and do things on occasion in a dramatic manner. But if when we think of Jesus Christ we see Him only in the role of the dramatic, and the spectacular, we not only short-change ourselves but we fail to appreciate Him as He actually is.

Now all of this comes by way of a subtle intimation from text that appears in the Gospel for today. It could well be in your reading that you never properly noted - - I speak at least out of my own experience, for as long as I can remember, when I've dealt with this 17th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, I've taken it as the writer intended it, as a lesson in gratitude, and as a measure of condemnation upon the ungrateful. Let me recall for you the details.

Having heard that the Itinerant One was coming their way, ten lepers came and begged Him to show mercy. They believed Him to be the miracle-worker. And even at some distance, which was right, they shouted, "Have pity! Have mercy!" Jesus Christ said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." The record says, they went. The record also says, "As they went, they were cleansed." One out of the ten came back to give thanks. Jesus himself says, "Where are the other nine? Has only one come back to give thanks?"

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Now I suggest to you, there's a reason for this lack of apparent gratitude on their part. It's a preacher's job always to be charitable with people, to put the best possible construction on their behavior pattern. Now I suggest to you, that had this miracle-worker dramatically - - - if when they said, "Have pity upon us" Jesus would have given the divine nod, and immediately they would have been cleansed - - every single one of the ten would have fallen upon his knees in His presence and thanked Him and shouted His praise. But Jesus did not see fit to perform the miracle dramatically. He had His own reason for telling them to do what they did. He said, "Go show yourselves to the priests."

Well now, for the moment at least, this they had done perhaps a hundred times before, and they had walked that familiar path many, many times before, and they had seen the same faces on that dusty lane as they were about to see as they followed the command of the Master. So it might have been that as they went, they really didn't expect anything to happen, because they were not able to appreciate what we might now term as the imperceptible grace of God. They didn't recognize it wholeheartedly when it occurred.

Now this is the subtle intimation in this text: it did not happen dramatically, it did not happen suddenly, there was no great surge, no great display of power. It was only as they were on their way that the miracle occurred.

Now this is a lesson I suggest that you and I must learn to master. We will be disappointed, we will be disillusioned, even in God, if we think we have only to come, and immediately God is going to jump, just because we fervently, and faithfully, turn to Him. God doesn't always act quickly. God

doesn't always act dramatically. Let me say it again, lest I be misunderstood - - - God is always acting, and His divine creative energy is always operative, but not always in the grand manner, as we evaluate and assess it. There is nothing dramatic about their turning their back upon Jesus Christ and walking away a familiar path, and going to a familiar place, and seeing familiar faces along the road. But as they were doing this thing, the miracle occurred.

God does see fit to work dramatically, but not always, and like as not, He's going to channel His grace in ordinary ways. We ought to remember that. And there may be times when we become impatient, impatient because we cannot see. "As they went".....they were cleansed.

A commentator on this text has made a statement that commands our attention. He says life sometimes doesn't give us time to get an answer to our prayers, the demands of life remain constant, and so in the meantime until we feel our prayer is going to be answered, we've got to go back where we were, we've got to face what we've got to face, even though we may think our prayers are being unanswered.....unanswered only because, for want of a better expression, there is such a thing as the imperceptible (from our point of view) grace of God. "And as they went, they were cleansed" - - - in the ordinary process of a day, the thing happened.

This is far more pertinent to my mind as I preach this sermon to you as I see it against the background of a recent number of weeks. You have no idea of knowing what anxiety and anguish of soul I suffer as I read the Scriptures, as I consider myself in duty bound to declare to you the truth of God as it's revealed through the Scriptures to me. And then when I think of the unsettling of our day, what almost occurs to me again and again -- the meaninglessness

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of our involvement, in strife and in armed conflict. Then as over against that, the riot that has taken place in one city after another. While I was away my heart and soul were with you, the people of this parish, never hesitating to discharge my obligation as your Pastor, even though I be absent.....when on one of those Sundays we heeded the call of the President of the United States to observe a Sunday, a particular Sunday, as a day of prayer. In my anguish of soul I knew full well that no matter how much we might storm Heaven's gates, and ask for peace and better understanding, the thing just wasn't going to happen dramatically. But rather, even before this sermon fell into place, it was being given to some of us to understand that in the ordering of a single day, in our becoming involved with inter-personal relationships with people, as we met them, and as we would allow ourselves to identify with people in the course of a single day, that there this thing would occur.

In a moment of crisis, of course, we always are touched by what appears as the dramatic, but the dramatic is only the expression of what's been going on all the time! So I've been led to believe that even when we want God to answer our prayer, we've got to find God at work where we happen to be and allow Him freedom so that His purposes might be fulfilled, in and through us...in the ordering of a single day, in the normal vocations of life, in the normal relationships of life.

All of this leads me to say to you, don't ever underestimate at any time the way God may be at work in the life of a single person. You and I do not always know what's happening inside a person's life. This is why I almost curse the pressures of our day and the teeming masses of humanity that surround us, because we have so little time to see a person as a person. Who knows but what

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the Church's greatest ministry in the years that lie ahead will be in the ministry to individuals. Sometimes we forget, this surely is true of what we find within the confines of our family circle, the need to see a person as a person, and to believe that God's grace can be operative in that person's life.

Wasn't it Wilson who went with Scott to Antarctica, who kept begging his superior to believe that something good was happening inside him. When that journal was given to all mankind as they ended their day together in the wasteland of Antarctica, the diary gives great tribute, because in the end he died brilliantly and magnificently. And yet all along there was this man, pleading with Captain Scott to believe that something was happening within him.

You can well afford to believe that God is at work in the lives of people. You can well afford to believe that God is at work in your life, as you face the common ventures of life, as you give yourself to the normal vocation of life. I want to tell you a story.

Leslie Weatherhead was one of England's great preachers. He allowed himself to be used as a channel of the Holy Spirit....

....you know that, don't you -- the Holy Spirit is always the preacher, not the human form that stands in the pulpit...
...you'll get a great deal more out of the sermon if you recognize the preacher in that light -- it's the Holy Spirit that preaches through the person, and when the man goes to the pulpit you ought to pray that this thing could happen to you.....

....in one of Weatherhead's sermons the Holy Spirit laid hold upon a young woman and she became a convert. She was thrilled with her new life in Jesus Christ. But alas, after a month she came back to Weatherhead and she said she was going to give it all up. She just wasn't making the progress that she felt she ought to be making as a Christian....."I can't control my tongue - - I can't allow my heart always to be ruled by love"she disliked certain people, she almost hated them, and she was constantly aware of this sin that so easily beset her. She wanted to make so much improvement....she wanted her sainthood overnight - - - she wanted to become an instant saint! So after four weeks, she said, "I'm giving it up."

I don't know what Weatherhead said to her, I don't know how he ministered to her, I am sure he did his best to be effective. But the story goes on to tell that shortly after she left his office he received another caller, and this was a man who came in and said: "Dr. Weatherhead, I'm not a member of your congregation, and I have never heard you preach. But would you please accept this five-pound note. It's a thank-offering. A daughter of ours came one time to hear you preach. She's been a different girl ever since. Something's happened - - we can see it.".....and it so happened that he was the father of the young woman who had just been in Weatherhead's office. She herself could not see the progress that was being made, but others could.

Be patient, my friend, God is always at work, in ways that we might not be able to see, in ways that we might not be able to understand. But at work He is. Occasionally in history you might find some evidence of His dramatic display of power; His preferred way is slowly, quietly, earnestly, in the lives of people, day by day, where they are.

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In anticipation of next Sunday, which is the Sunday before Labor Day, I cannot help but think of a man who became a convert to the Christian faith, and he said to the preacher, "Now what do I do next?".....as though he was waiting for the preacher to tell him, "Well, you can read the Bible School session next Sunday - - - or you can become the leader in Prayer Meeting on Wednesday - - - or you can serve on this committee of the congregation - - "

....but the preacher gave him no such answer.

When the new convert asked, "What do I do next?" the man of God answered,

" . . . you make sure that you do an honest day's work

. . . you make certain that you reflect God's love

where you live "

God is at work, day by day, as we pass from day to day, far more often than you and I may recognize. Herein lies our blessed hope.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE SONS OF GOD"
(John 3:2)

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I was three years of age when the first World War ended. That means, of course, I knew nothing about the causes of that first World War, I knew nothing about the conduct of that first World War, I knew nothing about the conclusion of that first World War. All these things have come to me from what I have read in the history books.

However, there was registered upon the fabric of my mind something of the impact that this World War I made upon men and women, and the type of casualty that remained from that conflict. It all came to me as I heard a simple illustration used by my home-town pastor, preached one time in the impressionable days of my youth. This was his illustration. He was referring to a gathering of the American Legion, whether it was a national convention or a state convention, I do not remember. But he was telling how when the American Legion had come together, the presiding officer suddenly found himself interrupted by a veteran who came x up to the platform....without any prior word whatsoever, he simply stood in front of the people who had come together and said, "Is there anybody here who can tell me who I am." He was a casualty of the war.

What that man said, it seems to me, is symptomatic of our generation, perhaps symptomatic of every generation, for man is someone who is trying to discover his identity. A number of years ago there was a helpful book written by this title: "Modern Man in Search For a Soul."

This has been characteristic of people everywhere - - always trying to find out who they are. One of the grand and glorious things about the Church

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is that she's always telling people who they are. It's the church that's proclaiming the saving grace of Jesus Christ which shouts to men -- "You're God's child, and God is your Father, and you belong to Him." That's why we could very properly interrupt the liturgy this morning, lest we so casually treat with that marvelous Declaration of Grace which says to brilliantly that " -- we are the sons of God."

Now as to the text: it's written in I John, it's the 3rd chapter, it's the second verse:

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God,
and it doth not yet appear what we
shall be: . . . "

....and then the text goes on to say something equally wonderful, to its conclusion.

I come to this sacred desk to remind you that we must be patient with people who are trying to discover who they are. Perhaps the most wonderful thing that ever happens to a man is when he makes the discovery just who he is, particularly when that discovery is that he's God's child.

I offer you now an admission: I do not always find it easy to be patient with people who do not think the way ordinary people think. Perhaps I speak for you when I say that all of us do not find it an easy thing to understand people who don't dress the way ordinarily people dress....we do not find it an easy thing to be patient with people who don't live the way ordinary people live, who don't talk the way ordinary people talk. Members of my own family tell me that perhaps I'm beginning to show my age because I admit that it does become extremely difficult for me to appreciate those who are on the far left. I don't know that I've always been able to appreciate extremes of any sort, because a man doesn't always think very objectively when he deals only in extremes.

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And so you can readily understand why I find myself in somewhat of a predicament today, when as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and one who fervently believes that the Gospel is for any man anywhere, to have a measure of appreciation for the far left, who live the way they do, who talk the way they do, who dress the way they do! And yet, in recent months I've come to accept the fact that whether it's a measure of charity or not, the ardor of one's soul demands that they be recognized for what they are, people trying to find their identity.

This ought to not surprise us over-much. There have always been the peculiar ones, having peculiar ways, in their attempt to establish their particularity. The gypsy has always been with us; the bohemian has always been a part of society, and maybe hippie is just another way of spelling gypsy, just another way of spelling bohemian.

This whole matter of "Who am I?" We all may have our moments of doubt and questioning and earnest searching. When the young German martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer lay incarcerated in a concentration camp, regarded by all who knew him as a saint....he himself had his moments of self-doubt, trying to establish and make plain to himself his true identification. In anguish of spirit one day he wrote a poem which I want to read to you right now.

"Who am I?
This, or the other?
Am I one person today,
and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once?
A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptible
woe-begone weakling?
Who am I?
They mock me, these lonely questions
of mind.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest,
O God, I am yours."

Bonhoeffer was simply saying what the Church is always saying -- we have the answer for it, we're God's.

Perhaps by this time you've tired of it a bit, but I can't help it, I go on telling you, when I declare for you in my own words that nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever cut asunder the bond between God and His child. Whatever else we are, says John as he writes to Christians, look upon yourself as God's child. No man ever comes into the fulness of life until he understands it in this way.

I'll grant you, it's a miserable thing for some people in search for their identity, that they run the risk of losing their own soul in the process. Blinded and confused and bewildered, and foolish, they may go to the very brink of hell trying to prove themselves, and to establish a measure of identity.

How fortunate we are, we who belong to the Christian tradition -- how fortunate we are that we who have this liturgy...how Sunday after Sunday, written largely by the experience of other generations, becoming the formal language of the Church, we declare to ourselves when we gather....

" We are the sons of God...we are the sons of God.....

...we are the sons of God - - "

And if that isn't enough to spell out meaning for your life, I don't know what is.

Now since we are God's children, we deal in terms of paternity and fatherhood. But do I have to remind you that paternity and fatherhood do not necessarily indicate the same thing. Paternity is being responsible for bringing someone into the world. Fatherhood is that very necessary and precious thing called relationship that continues through the father and the child throughout

the days of their years.

We who are Christian are baptized. If baptism means anything, it means being signed, sealed and delivered, and established as the children of God. A relationship that exists between a father and a son is fashioned, it's processed through the years, it's established. That's why even the liturgy is honest enough -- did you catch it as those words were proclaimed?

" we become the sons of God -- "

All men belong to God, but not all men behave as His children.

So this is something that brings us up short when we deal with this text, when John says,

"Beloved, now we are the children of God"

....who, me? ...right now?

...I who know myself so well?

...I who know my limitations far better
than you think I know them?

...I, who have to deal constantly with
the hostile feelings that I have toward people
that I have been meant to love?

....me?God's child now?

.....says the writer of this text:

"Beloved, now we are God's children."

And if I have trouble believing that I'm a child of God, think how difficult it may be for me to believe that you are a child of God, I who fail to appreciate the basic integrity of your soul....I, now, speaking as a fellow

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human being, any fellow human being, who never gives you quite enough credit for what your nobly intention to do and to become.....I who part company with Augustine, Augustine who said, "Whatever we are, we aren't what we were meant to be", and keep constantly emphasizing "we aren't what we were meant to be" in selling you short.

Despite the fact that I approved the correctness of what he said, I simply emphasize the negative, speaking now, you see, as myself, as a representative of your fellow men.....

...who, me?who, you? -- God's child -- now?

....because we know what God's like! God is love, God is truth, God is justice --

...who, me? ...always loving?

.....you? -- -- always just?

Well, let's reduce it to this level. Somebody's son is walking down the street. Somebody says, "Who is he? His behavior is far from being salutary." And somebody says, "Why, it's so-and-so's son." "Why, it can't be! So-and-so would never talk like that! So-and-so would never be found in a place like that! So-and-so would never be doing a thing like that!" And our friend says, "Why, of course it's So-and-so's son -- can't you see the features there?"

So this is the commentary on all of us, no matter how far we may stray. God has placed upon us His features, and even though I may not say it to myself, I ought to hear God say it, "You're mine.....you belong to Me."

Alvin Rogness has done a wonderful thing for us. In one of his writings he pictures creation, and he pictures creation in this fashion: God is the great King of the Universe....Heaven is His royal residence. He calls Earth part of

His Kingdom, and He says to His subjects: "You are my children. You are my royal sons. I am sending you to represent me on Earth. All the while you are there I want you to conduct yourselves as my children."

...for Rogness implies,

"Who then will be just if my children are not just?"

"Who then will love if my children do not love?"

He suffers the possibility of their forgetting these things. But He said, "If you forget, then no one will do it."

And then somewhere in the article he indicates that maybe God isn't much concerned as to just what we do in this world, as long as we conduct ourselves as His children. Which leads me to say to you, on this Sunday nearest Labor Day, while there's much to be said for recruiting men and women for full-time service in and through the Church, and while there is also a great deal to be said for sending men and women to the far corners of the earth as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, perhaps the far greater need remains for most of us to see the opportunity as a challenge to witness for Jesus Christ where we are with what we have, and like as not, through the normal vocations of life. They also serve who do an honest day's work for an honest dollar....planting corn, repairing cars, grooming horses, typing letters, feeding cows, driving taxicabs, pouring cement, laying brick, teaching youngsters, scrubbing floors, meeting the needs of men's bodies.....whatever it may be. God says, "You are mine, and do what needs to be done in a manner that becomes your Heavenly Father."

The tragedy is, we don't always remember who we are. Once when I was a student in college I went to worship in a Methodist church. The district super-

intendent was the guest preacher for the day. His name was Allen C. Shoe. He, too, had his illustrations in his sermon. He was telling how his daughter came to him when she was about to leave home. She said, "Dad, have you any word of advice and counsel to give me as I leave home?" He said, "Of course I have, and it's a very simple thing: never forget who you are."

Chrysostom, the great preacher of the early church, once preached a sermon advising parents how to bring up children. He had a wonderful suggestion: he suggested that parents should choose for their son as an example a Scriptural name, and then as the child grew and developed, they would constantly teach the child the meaning of the name, and forever challenge the child to conduct himself in life according to his name.

Beloved, now we are the children of God -- even though it does not yet appear what we shall be, now we are the children of God!

I want to close with a story that you ought to hear and a story that you ought to remember. Dr. Sangster, a preacher, tells it -- it's the kind of a story that any preacher could tell....of a man who was a member of his congregation who had a problem of alcoholism. He could never quite control it, and that fact bothered him. So one day he came to Dr. Sangster and he said, "You know my problem. What shall I do?" And Dr. Sangster said, "I suggest that whenever you find yourself getting out of control, get in touch with me"a kind of original Alcoholics Anonymous, you see, that fine and worthy group of people. So one time the fellow came to Dr. Sangster, perhaps almost out of control, that is, complete control. He had tipped the balance too far. Yet something remained. And when he came to Dr. Sangster he said, "Go ahead, Doctor, tell me I belong in the gutter, but for God's sake, tell me I don't belong there."

Beloved, we are God's children. And Sangster, when he used to tell this story, closed with this comment, which needs no further word from me. Sangster said: "He had lost his way, but he hadn't lost his address."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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September 10, 1967

"GOD'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY"

The full text for the sermon, which is II Timothy 3:15, reads as follows:

" - - and how from childhood you have
been acquainted with the sacred
writings which are able to instruct
you for salvation through faith in
Christ Jesus. All scripture is in-
spired by God and profitable for
teaching, for reproof, for correc-
tion, and for training in right-
eousness, - - "

Now, once that's been said, there isn't much else that needs to be said. And after you have read this text carefully, you can readily understand why I should say to you now that if one really wants to be a Christian, he can't be Christian without the Bible in his hand. You can't possibly separate the two, the Bible and the Christian go together.

One readily recognizes how Martin Luther put it, when Martin Luther said, "It is the Bible that leads us to Jesus Christ." And his understanding of the Bible was that it was eminently worthwhile, because both parts of it, the Old and the New Testament, point to and around and declare the fulness of grace which God has given to us in Jesus Christ.

Significantly enough, this sermon in the schedule comes in the day when we're installing our Church School workers, and as you heard it said, in the ministry of teaching. Years ago we used to refer to it as the Bible School. For some reason or another that terminology has gone by the board. I'm not so sure that it's a good thing that we should forget to put it that way, because the Bible remains the basic text of the Christian. And if you ever want

to picture a Christian with a book in his hand, the Book of books must always be the Bible.

And yet one does know that when he comes to talk about the Bible, Bruce Barton a number of years ago said, in a best-seller in his day, "It's the book that everybody owns, it's the book that nobody knows." Now there might be a variety of reasons why this could be true. Col. Chapman, who was imprisoned on one of the South Sea islands during the Japanese war, told how a group of his men, separated from civilization for weeks and even months, tried to occupy their time. Someone got the fine notion that perhaps they could read the Bible together. They began it. But they never ended it. For some reason they lost interest, and they never pursued it. But another fellow did happen to have, in the little company, an Oxford Dictionary, and they went through its thousands of pages, page after page, and found their time fully occupied and fascinating. But the Bible itself seemed to have lost its appeal for them.

So even when we say to ourselves, if you were to be stranded on a desert island, or if you were to find yourself in a fall-out shelter for a period of time and could take with you only a certain number of books, it's only an idyllic notion perhaps that says, " - well surely there, in such a condition and circumstance, you'd read your Bible, wouldn't you?"

Perhaps Col. Chapman's experience might offer a portent of what could be ours as well. There is something about this book that people learn to love and people learn to read. And yet the vast majority of them keep it around as a token of the Faith, and like the youngster years ago to whom I gave a Bible on his confirmation, some ten, fifteen years later showed it to me, almost as

fresh as the day I gave it to him, yet proud of the fact that he possessed it.

There are two things I would suggest that we keep in mind when we talk about the Bible. One is that it's a book that deals with the human situation. And this in itself is the reason why it ought to have an appeal for us. It does talk about us. It talks about man whose condition remains pretty much the same, one generation after the other. G. Elton Trueblood, in his book, "The Incendiary Fellowship" said that no matter how many great changes there might be taking place in our scientific and technological world, and no matter how many improvements you and I may have in the homes in which we live, basically the human situation has not been altered....which is simply to say in church language: man remains a sinner, and his need for God is as constant now as it ever was.

Now, if the human situation remains the same, then there ought to be a measure of comfort in knowing that when we turn to the Bible there is something to be said to us. For the Bible is a book that talks about us, the Bible is a book that deals with history. But maybe after you've said this, you have to very quickly admit that maybe this is one reason why people lose interest in it, because there are those who tell us that we are a generation that's fast losing its sense of history. One school teacher says, "It was different teaching school twenty years ago -- it was different teaching school before World War II. But so many things have happened in the last twenty years that seem to equal in importance, and even in the span of a man's mind, all that has happened in history preceding World War II." And so when you're overwhelmed by the events of recent times, who, then, is going to think in terms of two thousand years ago, when he's so completely overwhelmed by what has happened in the

past decade?

Driving along in the car one day I was listening to a new commentator talking about the number of different new nations that had been formed in the last twelve years. And he said that any map that you have of the world is out-dated overnight, and perhaps 20% of it is out-dated within a period of five years. So things move rapidly. The Bible goes back two thousand, four thousand, six thousand years. Even though we say basically the human situation does not change, yet who is interested in the perspective of history that far back, when he's pre-occupied with what Red China might do next year? ...when he's pre-occupied with what Russia did five years ago?

Then one may not turn to the Bible because he's also overwhelmed by what has happened in the field of science. Can a man pick up the Bible as you and I did, those of us who are in our 40's and 50's, in the days of our childhood, and have the same world view, when what science is teaching us now? Can we possibly turn to it and have the same view of the universe, before science came and explained so much to us? This may be another reason why people may not be reading the Bible - - even though it speaks to the human situation, for the simple reason that man forgets that basically he remains a sinner.

This leads us to say, then, with all the more fervor, that maybe we'd be far better off if we'd forget talking about the Bible speaking to human situation, if we began to emphasize the fact that the Bible is a book that talks about God. And maybe this is the better title: it's "God's Autobiography" - - it's God's Word to us. And a far better way of putting it is that the Bible is a book about...how God made us, how God deals with us, how God chastizes us, how God rebukes us, how even God talks about a place called

Hell....how God talks about a place called Heaven....how God talks about Jesus Christ.....how God talks about His Church, how God gives Himself, how God gives His Church....

....maybe we'd be far better off if that's the point we'd emphasize, and then, knowing ourselves as we do, we'd go again reaching for the Bible again and again and again, because man needs to see something over and above himself.

Then there was that earnest appraisal of the Scriptures which appeared in an advertisement: Since childhood we have heard what a great Book the Bible is. We accept that as a fact, and go along for years nodding our heads and saying "Yes." Once in a while, or maybe oftener, we read a passage or two. Then something happens. Things go wrong, troubles begin to pile up, and we don't know what to do. We try this and that and all the time there on the table lies the Bible tight shut. Now and then some man or woman facing defeat sits down with it and suddenly finds it talking like a friend, encouraging, guiding.

It's because we believe this that we emphasize as we do in this congregation the program of Christian Education. It's because we believe this that you hear us saying again and ever so often that Christian Education is not simply for boys and for girls, it's for adults as well. And this is why ever so often we call to your attention the fact that there is such a thing as the Sorrick Bible Group, a group for adults that meets on Sunday morning at 9:30. This is why we offer in our program opportunities during the week, in the course of the year, for study of God's Word in a small-group situation. This is why, as we anticipate Lent this year, part of our emphasis will be small-group Bible study

and discussion....that we might reach for the Book and open it.

When you drive through Gettysburg you may go down the street that leads to the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. On that street, not far from the circle, the Christ Lutheran Church stands. It has a series of steps that goes up to the main level. Right by one of the first steps is a type of monument of sorts -- Gettysburg is filled with monuments -- this is a pedestal-type monument and has on top of it the open Bible....reminding people in our generation that there was a pastor of that church who was killed by a bullet during the Civil War years. But the passer-by also will say to himself, maybe that's the way some people treat the Bible, too. They put it on a pedestal.... they elevate it -- they will even give it due and proper reverence. But there it stays.

The thing that our generation needs more than anything else is to hear God speak. Some of us despair of reading the newspapers, some of us find a measure of delight in going through the course of the day and not listening to a single news-caster. We are tired of the echo of men's voices, men's views, men's opinions. The time has come when maybe we'd better let God speak for Himself. The Bible is God's autobiography, and herein may lie our hope and our salvation.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD'S TWIN GIFTS"

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One every now and then can well afford to ask the question: how many people are there who seem to have a completely satisfying religious experience? The answer may be, not as many as we might think. And one doesn't have to survey the teeming masses as they pass by to get such an answer as that. One has only to read the New Testament, no less, this exceedingly precious book, to discover how many people there were in the day of our Blessed Lord who lacked a completely satisfying religious experience.

It wasn't that they were not religious, it was primarily that every now and then they had to have their religious thinking straightened out for them. When you read the New Testament for yourself you may readily recognize that a great deal of time was spent by Jesus straightening out the religious thinking of religious people. How often He had to set the scribes, the Pharisees and the Saducees straight. There were some things they just didn't understand; there were some practices they abused.

When one read the writings of the early Church he becomes rather acquainted with that man Paul, who went from town to town and who wrote letter after letter, and for the greater part he was simply straightening out the religious thinking of adherents to the Faith.

This, perchance, has been the history of the Church, that at certain times this emphasis has to be made and that emphasis has to be made, either as a matter of renewal, or perhaps as appreciation anew, for what has always

been considered a basic tenet of the Faith. Nothing, perhaps, is quite as perplexing to the Christian as trying to get the delicate balance between Law and Gospel. And that leads to the preaching of this sermon today.

Out of Paul's experience, he had two letters in particular that he had to write. One was a letter that he had to write to the Christians in Galatia. He had gone there and he had proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And there were men and women who came under the spell of his preaching and were captivated by the Holy Spirit, and they were baptized, and they embraced the Christian Faith.

But the Christian religion has always been studied by people who have not always understood things clearly and perfectly. Lo and behold, in Paul's tracks came a group of people called the Judaizers, who said to the men and women in Galatia: Paul has not told you the whole story! We're going to tell you that if you want to become Christians, you've got to become Jews first! You've got to become completely Judaized. You can't become a Christian without this kind of an experience.

Now Paul had proclaimed, because he knew what had happened to him, the wonderful gift of salvation which came free and full, and it opened up a whole new world of Christian freedom for him. And he had his own wonderful understanding of what the Law was. But these people came along and tried to saddle them with the side of the Law, allowing them to believe that they became meritorious in God's sight because they were fulfilling certain requirements, and that the net result would be that one day they could put their thumbs in their armpits and say, "Look, God, what a fine person I am, because I've kept the law, and therefore I merit favor in your sight." ...and this could be the

hope for their salvation. Well, Paul had this problem on his hand in Galatia.

Any man who gives himself completely to serving the Lord Jesus Christ will always be dealing with problems, and problem people, no matter where he may go. And part of his assignment under God is to straighten out the thinking of people. So Paul had to make plain to the Galatians that they did not have to be saddled by the Law -- these people were over-emphasizing the Law.

But in Corinth he had just the opposite problem. Here there were men and women in Corinth who were completely ignoring the Law, felt themselves under no obligation to live within what we might call a moral frame of reference, as far as God speaking to them through the Law was concerned. And in the new freedom which was proclaimed to the Christian, they even said, "For us all things are Law"a free translation would be, "We can do anything now that we're Christian."

Now this was the problem that he had in Corinth, to straighten out their thinking there, that even as a Christian, it's risky business for a man to say, "Now that I believe in Christ I can do anything".....as over against the problem in Galatia: "Now that I believe in Christ, I cannot serve Him wholly and freely unless I have my mental faculties whereby I observe His commandments rigidly."

Anyone who has ministered to people in the name of Jesus Christ can tell you that there are two types of people who bring a great deal of damage upon themselves and other people as well, and each needs to have his religious thinking straightened out. The one is the kind of a person who says that to be a Christian he's going to observe the law meticulously. So he sets down for himself certain basic requirements, and he would never allow himself not

to do that, and he becomes the type of person that Jesus Christ rebuked in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican -- he becomes the self-righteous person, because he allows himself to believe that he can be good in God's sight because of his nice little series of check-lists.

On the other hand, there is the type of person that I one day met in a print shop, and as he was fingering away at the linotype machine, he turned to me, in an almost despicable manner, and began to tell me some of the terrible things that he was doing, because, he said, "Now I'm without sin -- I've become Christian -- I'm saved! I'm sure I'm going to heaven."and in that new state he was committing sin far more gross than he had ever committed before, because, he said, this is a new freedom!

This is the risk that a man can run, in one direction or another! So it behooves a man, by whatever wisdom the Holy Spirit allows, to sit down and attempt to have his religious thinking straightened out.

When one does that, he's in duty bound to say over again and again: Law and Gospel, Law and Gospel. They are God's twin gifts to us. God in His wisdom has seen fit to give us both. They are twin words that belong in the vocabulary of every Christian, and without a proper appreciation for both there can be no understanding of the Christian religion.

Now, for our purpose this morning, what is Law? Law is what God requires of us. From the very beginning, when He saw fit to have what we now refer to as a "Chosen Race", He established a Covenant, and in that marvelous thing that He decreed, He said: "This is what I am going to do.....This is what I expect you to do -- this is what you must do." And mark you this well, from the very, very beginning, in a man's religious experience, as far as the

Hebrew-Christian tradition is concerned, there is that priceless and treasured word called obligation. A man is under obligation to God to do certain things. Maybe this is the note that we've forgotten in our day. Maybe for too long a period we've preached a "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" -- with arms outstretched to receive anyone and everyone....which is most certainly true. But maybe we've done this at the expense of an authoritative Christ, who can raise a finger in stern rebuke and condemnation....

...who can talk about such things as consignment to hell.....

...who can take people to task for what they did not do.....

Maybe we're beginning to pay the price of all the permissiveness which we've allowed ourselves in this generation, in more ways than one and in more places than one.

Maybe this is the area in which we have to straighten out our religious thinking now, that the Law does remain as a requirement on the part of God. For shame upon any Christian who allows himself to go his way completely ignoring the Old Testament. Sometimes I'm not so sure in my own mind that we've done the right thing in printing the New Testament and the New Testament alone, in certain editions, as though we could cut ourselves off completely from those 39 books that are part of the whole story of God.

But when you read the Old Testament you most certainly read about Law, and you also read about Gospel -- God's sign of favor and God's grace. And when you read the New Testament, while you read about Gospel, what God has done for us in Christ, you also read about Law. Maybe the thing needful for our generation is to emphasize anew the fact that God does keep in the vocabulary of the Christian the word obligation, the word duty -- that there are certain things that man must do, that there are certain things that God requires from man.

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You have only to examine your own life to discover for yourself how real this understanding of the Gospel may be. How often do you attend any meeting out of what we might refer to as a sense of obligation, that is, attend because God expects you to attend. There is such a thing as coming to church on a Sunday morning because one is fulfilling his religious duty. There is such a thing as fulfilling your role as you identify with the program of Christian Education, the ministry of service as you meet the needs of other people, as you project and extend the Gospel of God, at home and abroad, because you are fulfilling a duty to God.

But someone has characterized us as a generation that does things conveniently, when it happens to suit our particular fancy, when we, perhaps, might be in full agreement. Did it ever occur to you that God never asks anybody to do anything just because they happen to agree with Him? Did it ever occur to you that when God laid down the Ten Commandments, He didn't say, "Now observe these if perchance you feel so inclined to observe them." There isn't anything quite as rigid as the "Thou shalt" and the "Thou shalt not" of the Ten Commandments. So God began His relationship with us, on the basis of requirement.

Maybe we'll never completely find ourselves in this generation until we go back and begin all over again doing things out of a reference to obligation to God and His requirement of us. Maybe this illustration could speak to our need, and to our condition, and maybe the characterization of our time is that we are a people who are blinded....

In World War II there was a chap who was getting his first instruction as a pilot. Maybe he was panicking on the first day out. He suddenly discovered

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that he could not see. And with whatever sense remained, he got in touch with the control tower and gave them the message, "I can't see!" The man in the control tower got the word back to him - - "Listen carefully, and obey perfectly everything that I tell you." So the instructions were given... "...begin to lose altitude....bank sharply...." - one instruction after another. He found himself safely on land. It would never have occurred had he not obeyed completely the instructions that came from the control tower.

...a simple illustration, my friend. God's in the control tower of the universe. God is beaming out to us instruction which, in our blindness, might help us to arrive safely, but only as we obey completely what He requires.

But then man discovers also that when he goes to obey the Law, he can never do it completely and perfectly. Ever since the Fall, man the sinner cannot serve God, perfectly, completely. Now this leads us to an understanding of what the Gospel - - Law is what God requires from man, Law is what God expects man to do.....the Gospel declares what God does for us in Christ! God freely gave Himself that we might have eternal life. So the Apostle Paul went everywhere telling the marvelous story of what God had done in Christ. This is the Gospel: God who comes to us where we are in our sinfulness, God who opens the door and provides us with freedom, the freedom to love, and to live in love, and to do all things on the basis of love, the kind of obligation that rests upon a person who knows that he's been purchased by a price. Make no mistake about. There are some of us who want to be the better kind of parents, because now we begin to realize the kind of love that our parents showed upon us, and with our children and our grandchildren. It's the kind of a fulfillment that's being offered, because there is such a debt that we owe

to the love that we could never purchase. This is Gospel, the precious thing that we proclaim.

But beware, a man is not to take this freedom in Christ and abuse it, not even to allow himself the license of a new morality, that's says, "I can do anything, anywhere, any time"-- according to the requirement of the moment, without an over-all frame of reference. Of all the religions in the world I suppose every single one talks about man's duty to his god. You can make a study of it, and perhaps you'd come to that conclusion. But Christianity is unique in this regard. Christianity is the only religion that talks about both Law and Gospel....not only about what God requires of man, but also emphasises fully what God has done for men. These are His twin gifts to us.

Now let me remind you of a very simple parable, and a parable it is, and to be understood as a parable and only a parable. A man who had never been too spiritually minded in this world died and went to Hell. His friends missed him very much. His business associates went to the gate of Hell and said to the keeper of the gate, "Let him out. We need his advice, his skill and his professional wisdom." But the bars remained closed. He had achieved quite a name for himself on the soccer field. His team-mates came to the gate of Hell..."Let him out -- we need him in order to win." But the bars remained tightly shut. Then a woman came to the gate of Hell, his mother. She simply said, "Let me in -- let me go to him -- let me be with him."

...In its own way this is a parable of the Gospel....God who comes to us, God who identifies with us, God who gives of Himself and finds us where we are. If that isn't enough of a reason to want to obey God's Law, I don't know what is.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE EYE OF FAITH"

A man ought to be given a chance to finish his sentence. That's particularly true when you read Scripture. We ought not impatiently to walk away from the Word of God, just by giving something at first blush that's not particularly to our liking and to our pleasure. This is most certainly true with the text that serves as the basis of today's sermon:

"No man has seen God at any time . . ."

Suppose you stopped at that point and walked away? You could be of all people the most forlorn. For if this was the only thing that you had to say about God....."No one has ever seen Him - - "

But you ought to give even the writer of the Gospel record a chance to finish his sentence. For when he deals with this text and this great concept of God, he goes on majestically to add:

"No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him."

So reads the 18th verse of the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to John.

Whatever characterization you may have for the Christian, he was never meant to be a man with limited vision. A Christian is specifically the man-with-the-long-look, who sees beyond, even beyond beyond. In ecclesiastical, liturgical or Biblical language, we phrase it this way: unto life everlasting. A free translation may be that we might see things in this present world from God's point of view, for God is eternal - - God is infinite; man is finite. Man is a pilgrim here on this earth; the earth and the heavens belong to God, who is forever and

ever.

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But then once we've said that very quickly, to see things from God's point of view, we say that's exactly our trouble. For how is it possible to see things from God's point of view, when, Preacher-man, you've already told us that no man has ever seen God? If you're to see things from someone's point of view, then you first ought to be able to see him, you first ought to be able to understand him. And now you tell us that this can't be done.

What, now, shall we do with such thinking? For you and I have lived long enough to number among our friends those who could be branded, to a degree at least, as atheistic and agnostic. You've lost a great deal in this life if you haven't rubbed shoulders with people like that, and who knows but that you're not all that God meant you to be if you're simply associating with like-minded people, no matter where you may go. We who live in suburbia have sometimes been branded as living in that "pagan part of America" -- and it's a salutary thing to rub shoulders with those who may not think exactly as we think. Well perchance you have, and you've numbered among your friends and acquaintances those who have something of the atheistic and the agnostic lurking within them.

They may say to you as a believer, "But I don't believe in anything that I can't see." They're the school that maintains "seeing is believing." So now you and I believe in a God that we can't see. We believe in things that we can manipulate and handle and manage. You can't manipulate God....you can't manage God.....you can't handle God. So they say to us, we shan't believe, because we can't do these things.

And furthermore, clever as they are, they will come back to us and say, "You have taken away from us a belief in spooks and goblins and ghosts, because, you say to us, you can't see a spook and you can't see a goblin and so therefore

you don't believe in them. These things could be the figment of our imagination, but if we can't see them we don't believe them. So there are people who reason that way: why, I won't believe in spooks because I've never seen one....I won't believe in goblins because I've never seen goblins.

But what will you do now when they say to us, "That word Holy Ghost -- sometimes it's better interpreted Holy Spirit -- can you see a spirit?" And our friends have read the Scriptures just as well as you and I have read the Scriptures, and so they will put back into our lap this very text for this sermon: "No man has seen God, at any time." And they've even become so familiar with Scripture that they recognize one of the choicest of all definitions:

"God is spirit, and they that worship
him must worship him in spirit and
in truth,"

What, now, I say to you, shall we say to these people who confront us in such earnest manner?

Well this is why, perhaps, we read this verse of Scripture and we shy away from it: "No man has seen God at any time"....."God is spirit - - " And if there's one thing that God exacts from us, it's complete honesty. And we'd better reckon with that truth, for He is the Searcher-of-men's-minds, He is the Knower-of-men's-hearts, and you can't fool Him. This is why I can allow you this peculiar expression - - that God knows a measure of delight when we call ourselves sinners, because this is an honest appraisal of what man is in God's sight. And there isn't much that God can do for a man who is so sufficient and he doesn't recognize himself as a dependent creature, even where the salvation of his soul is at stake.

Honesty does become the Christian religion, and since this is a thinking

man's generation, we can well afford to offer candor in return. So the parent, confronted by the youngster who comes home from Sunday School asking the question, "Mommy, what is God like?" -- could well afford to begin by saying, "If it weren't for Jesus, we wouldn't know at all, and if we didn't have Jesus in the picture, we could go on saying that nobody ever knows."

Now we recognize, of course we do, that when a youngster asks that question today, the question may be the same, but the mood and the temper and the background against that question's being raised is entirely different from the mood and the temper and the background when that question was asked twenty years ago, thirty years ago, forty years ago. Even a youngster, first, second or third grade, raises a question against the background the like of which would have floored many of us at their age, three or four decades ago.

And the question commands an answer. God expects us to be honest. The person could well afford to say, "You want to know what God is like? God is beyond our understanding. To use a word, God is unfathomable. To borrow another word from an ancient creed, God is incomprehensible." Let's be as honest as all that.

That shouldn't throw you for so much of a loop, should it? There are lots of other things and lots of other people besides God that are unfathomable and incomprehensible. I give you the testimony of one man. I find myself completely perturbed at times, trying to figure how exactly why I said what I did at certain times, and why I reacted the way I did. And if I don't take myself to task, I have a wife who does, who says, "It seems so unlike you."

Man remains a mystery to himself. There are some women who have been mar-

ried for thirty years, and either she or her husband could say it: "I still don't understand him, what he's really like." There are parents who can say this of their children, of their own flesh of their flesh, blood of their blood -- why, we've reared them, we've trained them, we've brought them up within the closely-knit circle of our family, and to this very day I can't quite understand him....her....or even them.

If we can say this of ourselves as human beings, then why should we hesitate to say that we can't fully understand God, that He does remain incomprehensible? I suggest to you this morning that in the language of man, there is no word more shrouded in mystery, and when I say mystery I mean difficult to understand, than the word God. And perhaps it's well that it should be difficult, because the moment you and I fully understand the mind of God, then we would presume to be equal with God. Still as of old, man is finite, God is infinite.....God is eternal -- man is still the human pilgrim.

But the text says, and always give the writer of Scripture a chance to finish his sentence:

"No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him."

....as a sentence is finished, here is the ray of hope, here is the light on the way. God-who-is-incomprehensible says, there must be revelation, there must be interpretation. We cannot go to God, so God comes to us. So God comes to us in all His fulness in Jesus Christ.

This is the great glory of the Christian religion -- it's the only religion on the face of the earth that proclaims this wonderful news, that God stoops to our level, that God comes to us, that God is a self-revealing God. For what it

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may be worth, for what it may mean to you, I have never prided myself in being able to understand certain types of art. Recognizing my limitation, I will look for someone to explain and to interpret it, and how delighted I am if the artist himself should be near at hand, and then he, stooping to my level, will say to me: "This is why I shaded this the way I did....this is why I brought this symbol into the painting -- ".....and then little by little all becomes clear, at least clearer than it was. And all of this would happen only as the artist himself allows me to see it through his eyes, and the painting itself becomes a self-revelation, through the artist's eyes.

So God comes to us. No one has ever seen God, but the only begotten in the bosom of the Father, he hath revealed him -- he's made Him known to us. Here in the Nave....bless Mr. DeLong's soul, he insisted that we have a symbol for God's name. And up here at the highest point in this structure you'll find a symbol for God's name. And part of the symbol is the Dove coming down from Heaven with fire in his mouth, symbolizing God's descent to us, God coming to us, God making Himself known. So God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, and it's the Holy Spirit, God at work in our hearts, that enables us to see God in Jesus.

Now back up for a minute. You say God is spirit -- it's difficult for me to believe in any kind of spirits. All right, God says, I'll give you a human being (clothe that in its proper language)-- "I will become incarnate." So God comes to us in Jesus Christ, a person who actually lived, once upon a time, in a certain place. People walked with Him, people talked with Him, people saw Him suffer and die.

All right, now you have something, you say. In this kind of God perhaps I can believe, if with my limited vision I have to be able to touch and to handle.

But my friend, even there it's not as simple as you might like to make it. To see God at any time requires the eye of faith. There is such a thing as the eye of faith. It's really God's very special gift to us, and fortunate are the people who use it. Without it, what does a man have? Look back to those days when Jesus Christ was here on earth. Only a precious few looked upon Him with believing eyes, and put their fingers to their lips and fervently, adoringly said something about God. By far the greater part of them, with their limited vision, looked upon Him as an itinerant who would have been far better off if he had stayed there in Nazareth in that carpenter's shop. If you think it's difficult to say you can see a spirit and believe in a spirit, I suggest to you that it may be even far more difficult to see a human being and then say God, without the eye of faith.

This was Mary's problem, and yet from the very beginning she could say, "My soul does magnify the Lord" -- Mary pondered all these things and kept them in her heart. Of all the faith known to the children of men, perhaps none was greater than the eye of faith by which Mary looked upon Jesus Christhanging upon the cross, of all the people at any time who say Him there, there was the Centurian who with the eye of faith said, "Surely this was the Man, the Man of God.".....there was a dying thief who said, "Remember me" -- who saw in a human being God-made-real. The purpose of this sermon is to encourage you, my friend, to exercise the eye of faith and to believe that God can come alive, even in human beings.

Maybe that's what the Apostle Paul meant, when he once wrote to a group of Christians and he said, "Ye are Christs" -- and to this day they are never quite sure whether he meant apostrophe and a or simply the plural. This is the grand and the good thing that is to be said about the Quaker, who goes through

life on tiptoe, looking for that which is of God in every man.

Beloved, there is such a thing as the eye of faith. It's the most precious thing that God ever gave us. It ought not to suffer from attrition, mis-use.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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You will recognize the text as being included in the Words of Institution: "This do in remembrance of me."

Donald Baillie in his excellent book on the theology of the Sacrament, with almost transparent nostalgia, recalls the day when as a lad he went to his church in native Scotland. He recalls for us in a very vivid manner what he now refers to as "the Communion season." For in the Church of Scotland in those days, the Holy Communion was offered to a congregation about just once a year, at the most perhaps twice a year. It was heralded as the high-water mark in the life of that worshipping body of Christians.

Baillie recalls that for weeks in advance of that day, that special day, the preacher in his sermon would be alluding to the fact that come this particular day they would be receiving the Lord's Supper. For days, in anticipation of that day, even in the privacy of their own homes, the people began to make ready. But it was not enough that just on one particular day they should receive the Sacrament. Baillie indicates that for several weeks after that the congregation talked about the thing that had happened. With transparent nostalgia he recalls those days.

Then he said, "It seems that in our day people do not appreciate the Sacrament of the Altar as they ought." He makes bold to quote Karl Barth. Karl Barth's view of our lack of full appreciation for the Sacrament goes something like this: The Sacrament must be regarded not as something thought out by the Church from the point of view of solemnity, which it is...beauty, which it is...drama, which in reality it is....education...psychology...mystery, most

certainly, and so on. The Sacrament must not be regarded in these ways, but primarily as a matter of obedience to Jesus Christ and complete faithfulness to His Gospel.

If you're going to accept what Barth says to us, then you and I must come to only one conclusion, that is that abroad throughout the church today there could be detected a lack of willingness to fully believe Jesus Christ and to obey Him perfectly. Well, when a man becomes a Christian, he claims Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. And the very first thing that Jesus Christ expects of any man is not that he be perfect, but that he be willing to obey and to follow.

This is one reason why when the Church was young they never came together without celebrating the Lord's Supper - - every Sunday included in the worship experience was the centrality of the Lord's Supper. Particularly was this true for those who were nearest to Jesus Christ, for some who when they celebrated the Supper could say, "Yes, we were there the very first time -- we remember how it was done." And then as the Church has gotten farther and farther and farther away, could it be that she has become less and less obedient to her Master? And nowhere might this be more quickly revealed than in the lack of a full appreciation for the Sacrament of the Altar.

It is significant to note that when our Lord observed the Sacrament the very first time, He gathered together the faithful, and He said to them in no uncertain manner: "This do in remembrance of me." These words now are spoken authoritatively. And if it is one thing that perhaps our generation doesn't want to have done to us, is to have someone speak to us authoritatively.

The other side of the coin might be because each of us wants to be the

authority, and because we may not recognize it, it may still be true and therefore we resent it when somebody else speaks authoritatively. In the preparation of the series of sermons for this year, very shortly you'll be introduced to a series of sermons based upon the Ten Commandments, purposely designed for those of us who are confronted by the New Morality. If there's anything that's spoken authoritatively, it is God's "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not." Somewhere in a man's experience with Jesus Christ there must be this humiliation before Him as Lord and Saviour, and a willingness to obey. Now this is where you and I have to begin with our understanding of the Sacrament.

Make no mistake about it, we can't possibly fully understand it. If the Sacrament is anything, it is mystery, because in the Sacrament all the fullness of God in Jesus Christ comes to us. And who makes bold to believe that he can fully understand that?

So therefore, one says to himself, even though I may not understand, I am in duty bound to obey. When our Lord celebrated the Sacrament He did not give options, alternatives to His disciples. He said, "This do in remembrance of me." When we have our conferences with parents on the night preceding the baptism of their children, and we say to them, "If somebody were to say to you, why are you having your child baptized? -- or if someone were to say to you, why have you been baptized? -- you can well begin by answering in this manner: I happen to be a follower of One who said, in a parting command, 'Go ye into all the world....preach!...teach!...baptize!'" If someone were to say to you, "Why are you in church today?" -- you could well afford to answer by saying, "I happen to be the follower of One who having shared the Supper with His disciples, said, 'Do it in remembrance of me.'" He wasn't too

much concerned with the precise manner or method or mode as much as that people should come together and receive in the Bread and in the Wine, no matter how it is offered, the fulness of Jesus Christ.

After one passes beyond the word, "This do" as a sense of command, he comes to recognize what our Lord said.... "in remembrance of me." We Lutherans are always talking about the Real Presence, and sometimes we short-change those who talk about the memorial aspect of the Lord's Supper. There's much to be said for the fact that it is a memorial gesture. Baillee also says in his book, as he gives us an excellent turn of speech, "in the Sacrament we have something between a memory and a hope" -- recalling, of course, these words, that as often as you receive the Lord's Supper 'ye do show forth the Lord's death until He comes again'....the death -- something that happened -- until He comes again -- the blessed hope. So in the Sacrament you have both a backward and a forward look.

Do I have to tell you that there are some things that a man ought to forget? There is a member of this congregation who comes to me every now and then, in a most helpful way, and says, "Pastor, there are things that people ought to learn to forget"....the injustices that have been done to them, the unkindnesses that have come their way, the words that were spoken in impatience.....there are some things that a man must learn to forget.

But on the other hand, a man's character is fashioned by the things he remembers. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ says, "Remember me." As salutary as it may be to find out certain people who stand out as exemplary characters around which we can allow our lives to pivot, each of us needs his type of hero. And yet even heroes in this world have feet of clay. For our sake, then, the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Remember me -- look at me."

Significantly enough, then, in the central panel of the altar in this church is now the portrayal of our Blessed Lord -- in the center, with His disciples around Him. He did not say on the night in which He was betrayed, mark you well, "Remember Andrew".... "Remember James".... "Remember John" -- -- He most certainly did not say, "Remember Judas" -- the kind of remembrance that some of us find so easy to recall, the evil in people before their virtue -- He most certainly did not say, "Remember Judas."

But He did say, "Remember me.... what I have done for you, and what I am." And so the Christian goes on his way through life forever remembering that once upon a time at a particular period God broke through and gave us Jesus Christ, and the world has never again been the same.

Now in the Sacrament you not only look back to what Jesus Christ did, you also look forward, showing His death until He comes again, expecting Him to appear. A man is known by the things that he expects. This is what we mean when we say we live by hope -- "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." And Bernard of Clairvaux very properly, according to the Roman Catholic understanding of the Sacrament, could say to his fellow monks, "What a happy thought to be awakened in the darkness of the night, as the morning begins to come, and then to know that when we go down into the chapel, there in the Host that's reserved in the tabernacle on the altar, God is waiting to receive us." We may not subscribe to this doctrine of transubstantiation or even in the reservation of the Host, but it's a blessed thing to know that God somewhere is waiting to receive us.

I would now close by reminding you of the words in the Old Testament lesson, of the man who said, "God was in this place, and I did not know it." We who cherish the concept in the Sacrament of the Real Presence -- don't let it be said that Jesus Christ should be here offered, and you did not know it.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD'S PICTURE BOOK"

There was once a preacher, I am told, who reversed the ordinary procedure, where, instead of greeting his people after the service was over, after the sermon had been preached, he came to church early and greeted the people as they came. He shook their hands as they entered the church, he looked straight into their eye, as best, perhaps, to ascertain just what was in their thinking as they came to God's House, and if perchance there was any who had a troubled soul, that hopefully he might speak to that person's condition.

I have no intention of introducing such a procedure here in Saint Luke Church. But if I ever were to question the validity of such a procedure, what happened this morning in Saint Luke Church before any of you came would surely have removed whatever doubt I have as to its validity.

For I was here before anybody came this morning, for the most part, that is, and then a parishioner came. And as she saw me, these were her words: "How do you have wisdom and courage to preach on the text which you've chosen for your sermon today?" Well, if that isn't enough to set anybody up, and frankly I say to you, I have neither wisdom nor courage, as far as this text is concerned.

Now, lest you have not been as well prepared as she, and incidentally that's why we do go to all the trouble to print the MESSENGER, one page of it at least, hoping that when you get it before you come to church (if delivery is that effective), you might be able to read the sermon title, and the text, and then allow yourself prior preparation by reading the Scriptural setting before you come to church.....well, she had done that, and she was completely

bewildered and confused by the text which reads as the 30th verse of the 10th chapter of John:

"I and the Father are one."

It does take wisdom, it does take courage to handle a text like that. I do not pretend to possess either. But I know one thing, that I can't possibly ignore the text. The text has laid hold upon me, and I am in duty bound to wrestle with it, even in your presence, and to that end I invite your prayers, that perchance the Holy Spirit may lay hold on us together and that this text could speak to our condition.

Bewildered and confused? -- of course -- because the text deals with Jesus Christ, who now maintains that He and God are inseparable and ready to be identified one with the other. Imagine, can you, a carpenter's son wandering around from one Galilean-Judean village to another, and then telling people that He and God are one! Imagine a group of disciples, earnest-minded as they were, completely committed, coming and asking the age-old question: "Well, what is God like anyway?" And then their prophet amongst them, their pilgrim-companion says, "Why, I have an answer for that question -- if you want to know what God is like, look at Me! Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father." Well this should add to your bewilderment and confusion, to think that anyone should ever be able to speak like that.

And then as you remember Scripture....because you're not a stranger to Scripture -- you do remember, don't you, that one of the men nearest to Jesus Christ, perhaps the one who had the title of being closest to Jesus Christ, has more than one chapter in the New Testament. There's a Gospel that carries his name, if you want to give him the authorship of it, and then there are some letters that he wrote. And on at least two different occasions this man

who was so very near to Jesus Christ says, "No man has seen God at any time."

Well, after all the prefatory remarks are made, incidental to the preaching of this sermon today, let me now tell you how I'd planned to begin the preaching of this sermon, before 7:30 this morning.

The first sentence goes like this: No word in human language is clothed in mystery more so than that word God. No matter where you may go on the face of the earth, and you should find that man has fashioned for himself a language, invariably his language will include some reference to God. It might not be with the same understanding that you and I include the word God, but any man, anywhere, invariably will have in his vocabulary a word for God. And by the same token, whenever he uses that word God, it will be clothed in mystery. He will never be able to fully explain to anybody else, even as he cannot fully understand, all that it means.

Now you may remember on occasion I have told you that this should not trouble you overmuch, because you remain at times a mystery to yourself, and other people remain a mystery to us, and it's absolutely possible for a man to be married to a woman for fifty years and to have her say of him, "There are times when I just don't quite understand him." And we parents are always saying this of our children, and our children are always saying this of us. Now if on this level we can't quite understand one another, then why should we presume to believe that we can ever fully understand God?

Now because God remains mystery, He suffers from abuse and misuse and the understanding of the term is always lacking somewhere. Now in his attempt to understand God, we human beings start picturing Him. And would you agree if I now suggest that for some of us, maybe our earliest picture of God, to which we still cling rather tenaciously, is the picture of an old man -- a grandfather,

of course -- kindly disposed to the people. He has a beard, He has white hair, He has a long flowing gown. And whenever people come to Him, somehow He never quite gets around to saying No to anything that they ask.....

....so people picture God.

Or, on the other hand, they might picture Him with a frown on His face....

...the God who has laid down the rules and the regulations....

...the God with the great big book in His hand, and pen, marking the record -- the book in which your name appears, and mine, and all those spaces after it.....and then perchance, when we do not obey, He becomes angry with us, and then when we talk about God, in the same breath we talk about earthquakes, we talk about floods, we talk about cancer.....we talk about all the tragedy in life, and we hold God responsible for it....

...so when we picture God, this is the kind of thing that we might do.

And sometimes when we picture God we do one of two things:

We drag Him way down to our level, and make Him almost like a brother -- we can give Him white features on His face...we can interpret Him as Western man -- we become so chummy with Him that we can even call Him "The Man Upstairs".....a very sacrilegious thing to do.

On the other hand, when we think of God, we may become so learned and so sophisticated that we push Him very, very far away and we call Him "The Ground of Our Being"...."The Ultimate"...."The Great Idea"....."The Source of All Energy"and when we do that He gets farther and farther away in our attempt to picture Him.

Now on either score, I suggest to you, that this is the work of people who have an untrained eye, and to picture God you need to picture Him with a trained eye. You need to see Him in proper focus, you need to see Him clearly and plainly, just as He is. To that end, God comes to our rescue, God gives us His picture book, if you please.

For our purpose this morning, look upon the Bible as God's picture book. Whenever you come to understand the Bible, understand it in that way, won't you -- it is a book about God! It's not essentially a book about man. It's not a history text. It doesn't deal primarily with science, it's not even primarily literature, even though to a degree it may qualify as any one of these. But above all else, it is a book about God -- it's God's words to us, it's God's revelation of Himself to us, through its pages.

And as we use the Bible, then, our eye becomes trained to see God as He really is. It may take a bit of doing, but it can be done, and the emphasis for the moment is, as He really is. Take as an example the family album. It could well be that the dominating figure in the family album is the head of the family, the father. And carefully the hands through the years have chosen the photographs that they include in the album, and so you're first introduced to father, on the day of his birth, or shortly thereafter.....there's the photograph that was taken when he's but a child.....and then as you turn the pages you get a picture of him, carefully preserved, the day he went to school for the first time.....then somewhere in the album his picture as a graduate.....then the picture of him when he went to his first job.....then, of course, his picture on his wedding day...in proper sequence, the birth of their first child.....

And so you pass from page to page, photograph to photograph, seeing him

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in a variety of different roles. And in each role a particular function to be fulfilled, but forever basically the same person. I would suggest to you that when you read the Bible, and this is a bit of a risk for me to tell you this, that perchance you might see, as you turn the pages of the Bible, the many faces of God....one profile after another....ever the same, basically, but on this occasion or that occasion He fulfills this role or He fulfills that role. Then as a person takes the family album and recalls Dad's life here on earth, it could be with a degree of veneration and adoration, and surely respect - - the son or the daughter may say, "But this is what Dad was really like"...and then you turn to a particular photograph that excels all the others, in which all the fulness of his features blossom.

So you come to me this morning and you say, "What is God like?" I'll say, "Why don't you turn to His picture book? Let God speak for Himself." So you turn to the Bible.....and this is the advantage that you and I have as Christians, we do have the picture book in our possession. And as you begin at the very first page you see Him, there He is, as Creator - - that's your first introduction to God. This is what He's like, He's the one who created the world, He created the universe. And the crowning glory of all His creation is man.

Now, God as Creator then must be fully understood as one who, having made His world, puts His stamp upon it. God having created the world, continues to possess the world. Now, the crowning glory of His creation is man. You look now from the Creator to the created. And you discover that when He made man, He gave him freedom of will, He made him a free agent....and man as he progresses says, "because I am free, I'll run this old world the way I want to run it." And man is always trying to wrest the control of the universe out of the

hand of God.

Man, being created a free agent, is a willful person. God, the Creator, is also willful. And the eternal conflict becomes part of the scene: man trying to wrest the universe out of the control of God - - God not about to let man do it.

Well once this all is established, then what does God say as Creator? God says, "I am more than Creator." And God, then, has a continuing interest in His world, a sustaining interest in His world. And the one thing that God will never say: "I will let my world go straight to Hell."or another way of putting it is that nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever cut asunder the bond of love between God and His child.

.....So therefore God continues to reveal Himself in different ways....
...He takes on the role of the priest, and the prophet, and the judge, and the king.....you turn page after page and you see this continuing interest on the part of God. And then we one day come to that section in His picture book in which He's portrayed as a shepherd. Perhaps there is no figure of speech for God in the Old Testament so dear to our hearts as the shepherding love of God.

But the picture book is not complete until you come to the New Testament, and there one day we find someone named Jesus -- of whom it has been said: "In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell"so much so that today, as you and I wonder what God is like, we look to Jesus Christ and we say, "That's what He's like." Now this is the advantage that you and I have in the Hebrew-Christian tradition -- we have the sacred writings -- it is God's picture book, God revealing Himself for us.....never quite as completely, surely never as

perfectly as when He comes to us in Jesus Christ.

I know anguish of soul for all those who never so much as reach for the picture book. I know anguish of soul for those who go their way with their own pre-conceived notions of God, remaining forever faulty, never allowing God to say, "Let me focus for you my own image - - let me help you to see clearly."

As one turning the pages of a family album, only to exclaim at the sight of a particular photograph: "now that's the way I remember him; that's the way I knew him best." So we turn the pages of the Bible, confronted by one portrait of God after another - - - creator, ruler, judge, shepherd - - - only to exclaim as we see Him in Christ: "and that's what He's really like"

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"BY THE RAIN FROM HEAVEN"

The text, from the 11th chapter of Deuteronomy, the 11th verse, which is the Old Testament lesson for this day which marks the Festival of the Harvest:

"but the land which ye go in to possess,
it is a land of hills and valleys, and
drinks water by the rain from heaven."

A pastor invariably is grateful for what he hears his people say. While you may look upon him as one who is always speaking, by the grace of God, he can also listen. Says one pastor, I am indebted for what my people have taught me; as an example, the woman who keeps saying, "Learn to make haste slowly."

You greet this statement, of course you do, with a half-smile. A half-smile because at once you understand, almost, what she means, and a half-smile because at the same time you see the facetious aspect of the statement. You might just as well say, "Run! -- slowly.".....you might just as well say, "Come at once -- immediately! -- take your time."

..."Make haste slowly"?.....as much as to say, let there be action, but reasonably so, not recklessly. The important thing is that you should arrive safely, and in one piece, and sanely so.

All of this, you see, leads to the lesson of lessons that comes to us from the Festival of the Harvest. It's the lesson of patience. Now before anything else is said, allow this observation to be made: that years ago, perhaps more than one generation ago, when Christians gathered together at this time of the year in their place of worship, they anticipated the Festival of the Harvest.

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It was from their own gardens, from their own fields, that as they came to God's House they brought the fruits of the good earth. And when this remained in the calendar of the Church generations ago, not the least among the purposes to be served was the fact that people might know again that it is by the creative hand of God that they are constantly sustained and supported. It's spelled out for us magnificently that God is a God of providence, that his hand outstretched to us is never empty, and they had on all sides, you see, Exhibit A.

It's a far cry from the present day. Who thinks of God when he reaches on a grocer's shelf for a loaf of bread, already sliced? Who thinks of God then? How different it was when the farmer, having prepared his fields, sowed his grain, waited for the harvest, carted off to the mill his wheat, brought it back in sacks of flour....then the woman prepared for the oven the dough and brought it out freshly baked. Even the devout French peasant, when she prepared a loaf of bread for the oven, made upon it the sign of the cross and even marked it as such, as a token of the fact that God is involved, and by the hand of God we are fed.

One of the lessons, undoubtedly, when the Church introduced into its calendar the Festival of the Harvest, was to remind us that we are by the hand of God sustained, and it is by God's bounty that we are maintained. But one of the other lessons that also comes as we mark the Festival of the Harvest is the appreciation for the fact that patience is a virtue. When a man would sow his crops in days gone by, once the soil had been prepared, once the seed had been sown, and on occasion he would cultivate it.....then he simply did nothing but wait until the time of harvest would come. There was nothing else that he

could do except wait. And in his waiting he learned many a lesson.

So I submit this morning to you on this day that marks the Festival of the Harvest, that we look for the lesson that God has to teach us, and perhaps the most important of all the lessons is the lesson of patience. It takes time to get a harvest. Oh, we've lost so much, perhaps, in this transition from the agrarian civilization to a technological age and an urbanized society. There is much to be said for that day gone by, for so many of us, when even in mid-winter you anticipated the postman's arrival because he would bring the seed catalog. Do any of you remember it? -- and how a family council might be held as to just what variety of seeds would be ordered this year....

...shall we go on this year and get the old standby,
Golden Bantam, or should we get this hybrid,
highly advertized now, called Silver and Gold?
...shall we get the same variety of peas that we had
last year? -- they really didn't do quite as
well as we had hoped....

...and should we experiment this year with bush limas?
....surely this was the kind of conversation that took place in more than one home.

And then the order would be filled in, sent back to the seed company, and then with anticipation one would wait for the arrival of the shipment, hopefully in ample time for the readying of the ground. Then it would be plowed, and perchance you found a handyman in the neighborhood who went from house to house -- he had quite a schedule, you see, and by hand he would spade a plot of ground for many a villager. Once the onions had been set, then one also waited for

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the first "onion snow" as they called it. And after the first "onion snow" then perhaps warmer weather. More than one pastor who served a village congregation or parish could expect at certain times of the year that somebody in his congregation would say, "Pastor, we don't have to tell you, do we? -- you're going to pray for rain this Sunday, aren't you? You know what the fields look like, you know how apparently the crops are drying up. It doesn't look like a very promising harvest -- we must have rain. You will offer intercession for rain?"

And in doing so he was observing a custom that is almost as old as man himself, surely as old as Christian man....and even antecedes that, precedes it, because here is the antecedent, from the days of the Old Testament, when God made it known to Moses that they were going to go into the promised land. He gave them to understand that it was going to be a different situation in the promised land. In Egypt they watered their crops by irrigation....in the promised land, even as it was spelled out for you in the Old Testament lesson for the Day, it was a land of hills and valleys, without irrigation, and the fields would be watered only by the rain from heaven. And God controlled the heavens, and he was led to believe that it was only according to God's pleasure that the rain would come, which also meant there were times and seasons when he simply had to wait.

Of all the lessons that God sees fit to teach us through nature, none perhaps is more important than patience. And it is of all the lessons the hardest for some of us to master. In an age characterized by its activism, it could well be that one day, and much to our sorrow, we shall see that our greatest single crippling influence came through our impatience. More harm, more injury, is done,

in almost any realm that you may care to consider, because of our impatience.

Take the realm of inter-personal relationships....we who sit in judgment on other people before we know all the mitigating circumstances and facts, so quick to judge -- that's the way it's expressed -- so quick to judge. And then in our impatience we indict them, and condemn them, no matter where you look, it's happening...

...on the international scene....impatently we deal with a land, and with a culture, that's accustomed to taking its time. This is the great conflict between the East and the West -- in the realm of interpersonal relationships, now in the realm of international relationships, how quick we are to judge our leaders.....in the United Nations....in our own government -- we want immediate solutions.

If anything that age teaches some of us, it's surely this, that there is no longer a simple answer to any problem. There is always the complicating factor, readily recognized or not, and so in our quest even for world peace we forget that peace will come only when those who desire peace also desire the things that make for peace.

In the realm of interpersonal relationships, within the family circle, what is the problem of problems in your family circle if it isn't characterized by impatience?....the husband impatient with his wife, the wife impatient with the husband, and the parents together impatient with the children and the children together impatient with their parents. You may not be willing to accept this, but I am of the opinion that we expect our youngsters to grow up too fast, and too soon. And I'm not so sure that it's a good thing that we're cramming so much into them, on an academic level, and the pressure that we parents bring to bear upon them to learn so much, so soon.

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I also suggest for what it may mean to you, and only a certain percentage of you might be able to appreciate this -- I think it's been a sad day when a youngster couldn't look forward to his first pair of long pants. There is something to be said for waiting until that day would come. Now a boy can't remember when he didn't have long pants. It was symbolic of a certain arrival of a particular time in his life!

I'm not so sure that we're doing the right thing in rushing off a sweet young child to the hair-dresser. Maybe there's something to be said for the time when she could anticipate, at a particular time in her life, when this was the kind of thing that could be expected.

On the other hand, this is part of our problem with today's hippies, undoubtedly, an impatience on their part to draw on life everything that life has to give before they've earned their right to take it.

Impatience, the characterization of our age. The impatience that a man might even have with his own spiritual growth and development. Some of us are constantly bugged by it. With all our heart and soul we want to be so much better than we are, and believe you me this when I tell you, this is true for far more people than you may care to admit. And while God may break through to a man's soul and there may be this great precise moment of conversion, it takes time from conversion to the ultimate in sanctification.

It takes time to grow, and to mature, and of all the things that we would be able to give people is a measure of time. This is what you and I want from God -- precisely! If it's the one thing that we want from God, even more than pardon, perhaps, is that He deal patiently with us. If perchance we would believe that He's going to send us to hell, then, God, keep putting it off -- "Put it off, God!"

Maybe this is characteristic of human nature, that the thing it wants most from God is patience. And as you notice in the Declaration of Grace that followed our prayer for pardon this morning, as the Church spells it out magnificently:

"The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life - - -"

.....if that isn't asking God for patience, I don't know what it is.

So on this day that marks the Festival of the Harvest, I would remind you, from the time of the planting of the seed until the harvest a man had to wait. And he was taught many a lesson as he waited.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"MAN-WITH-THE-BOOK"

A Sermon For Reformation Day
1967

by The Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.

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"MAN-WITH-THE-BOOK"

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John Osborne in his play LUTHER has Pope Leo X saying: 'There's a wild pig in our vineyard, and it must be hunted down and shot.' Said the eulogist at the funeral of the Pope's "wild pig" as he referred to Martin Luther: "An angel flying through the midst of heaven, who had an eternal gospel to preach." Wrote the author of TIME magazine's cover story (issue of March 24, 1967): "Of few men can it be said with absolute certainty that they changed the course of history. Jesus was one; so was Karl Marx. Still another was Martin Luther."

In this year that marks the 450th anniversary of the Reformation, try as we may we can not take our eyes off that man - - wild pig or flying angel! A remarkable surge of new interest in him continues, as we are advised and likewise reminded that within the past fifty years there have been more books written about Luther than about any other Christian figure, including Jesus of Nazareth.

And many of these books are attempts to characterize and to understand Luther - - a man of diverse temperaments and a fulfiller of a number of different roles. Of him Roland Bainton could say in his "Here I Stand" (generally regarded as one of the best of the modern biographies of the reformer) "Luther is not an individual. He is a phenomenon."

The spectrum is made wide by those who would define him for us.

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Dr. Jerald Brauer, dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, in something other than an expansive mood maintains that Luther is "one of the three or four greatest figures in the history of Christianity, perhaps the greatest prophetic figure in post-Apostolic Western Christendom." John Osborne, playwright, feasting undoubtedly on many choice passages (touching upon his 'fears, foibles and physical ailments') written by Luther himself in his writings which number at least 100 volumes sees the Man from Wittenberg as a 'manic-depressive lout, whose rebellion against the church was motivated by a father fixation and a bad case of constipation.' TIME's essayist dismisses him as "prayerful and beer-loving, sensual and austere, he was the least saintly, but most human, of saints."

Now granted, however, that every age has been able to see in Luther the heroic proportion it prefers, the amazing thing (and deeply gratifying) in our day is the increasingly favorable light by which he is being viewed by Roman Catholics. Look where one will in Rome and invariably there is to be found those who do not deny that he was an extraordinary thinker of spiritual truth. Without hesitation they will even admit he did what he did out of "tragic necessity" due to the corruption of the Renaissance Church and the stupidity of its papal leadership.

The highly regarded Jesuit John Courtney Murray called Luther "a religious genius - - compassionate, rhetorical and full of insights." It has been reported that an American theologian teaching in Rome main-

tains that "Luther was right on indulgences and on most theological points. His teachings on justification more palatable to me than Thomas Aquinas."

In this day when we make much of renewal in the church, a direction that is being taken in all parts of Christendom, East and West, Roman and Protestant, we do well to remember that renewal is meaningless unless there is a renewed man. Quite naturally then we focus upon the individual and the church draws its encouragement rightly so from those who remain as our teachers: the 16th century reformers, chiefest of whom is Martin Luther.

In this day when we make much of reformation, recalling it is a movement within the church and noting likewise in what might be called the "Protestant Capital of the World," there is in Geneva a "monument to a movement." Yet even this monument is a series of heroic-sized carved figures of the reformers. Try as we will we cannot take our eyes from the man among them -- a man named Luther.

What now can we make of him? We have been told repeatedly that he defies easy characterization, since "his life and work add up to a complex of paradoxes."

But I am not interested in the man merely as a personality, nor, I dare say, should you be. Rather he is to be remembered because of his soul struggle: how a man is made right with God. We turn to him repeat-

edly because of what we can learn of the most fundamental of Christian concerns: the sinner-God relationship.

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So we concentrate on Luther, and in doing so bring him into sharp and clear focus. In this attempt, we change the lens-setting from the fear-ridden monk to the faith-released prophet of the new age. By his own testimony he saw himself as a doomed and miserable sinner. Recalling how he felt as he performed his first Mass, he wrote: "I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, 'Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine majesty? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin, and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God.'" The mood prevailed and his apparently imprisoned soul one day exclaimed in anger: "I do not love God! I hate him!"

But God who is love wants to be loved! And where did Luther find that "missing love."?

Luther had gone to Wittenberg University, and there he was professor of Biblical studies. It was perhaps the most natural thing in the world that he would at one and the same time become both intrigued and troubled by the scriptural accent upon righteousness. His attention was especially drawn to the Psalms and then most particularly to Paul's theme in Romans: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

Now hear him speak for himself as he looked back upon those days:

"Night and day I pondered, until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which, through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise."

So Luther declared anew the doctrine of justification and the cornerstone of the Reformation was laid. But his sola fide would never have been possible without his sola scriptura. Therefore, the focus is now sharp and clear: Man-With-The-Book!

As he studied with more-than-average diligence the Scriptures, his subsequent theology was definitely emerging. A summary could be stated in this manner:

1. Man is a sinner by nature, and the effects of original sin remain in him throughout life.
2. Only grace, which is God's gift through Christ and the Holy Spirit, can drive out this sinfulness.
3. Since grace is a free gift of God, it can never be earned, only accepted.
4. Grace comes to us through faith - - when

we accept God's word under the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

5. Because faith and grace are free gifts of God, no Christian has grounds to boast of his righteous works.

6. Christians, therefore, must be confident of their salvation, not because of the works of man, but because of the works of God.

Quite naturally then the Reformation movement became a movement of the Bible. In no time at all the relationship of tradition and scripture would loom strongly upon the horizon. The reformers, Luther in particular, had a high regard for the Church Fathers. But even the Church Fathers were to be measured by the Holy Scriptures.

Luther made his finest contribution as he firmly and surely turned the pages of the Good Book. Typical of his worth to the church is the way he exploded in the face of Rome's ace theologian John Eck at Leipzig after an 18-day debate in 1519:

"A council may sometimes err. Neither the church nor the Pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture."

Quite understandably the poet Konrad Ferdinand Meyer could say of Luther: "He senses the monstrous rupture of the times, and securely

clasps his Bible."

There you see him now in proper focus, this phenomenal one. He is the man-with-the-Book.

And I say to you that the man-with-a-book is a symbol worthy of respect - - - and - - - one could also add -- fear. At many junction points in history it has been the man-with-a-book who has been followed for good - - or for ill.

Can you think of Karl Marx without thinking of "Das Kapital"? Can you separate Hitler from his "Mein Kampf"? Melancthon from his "Locí"? Calvin from his "Institutes"? Augustine from his "Confessions"? Darwin from his "Origin of the Species"? Paul from his "Epistles"? Martin Niemoller, for over eight years in Dachau and Buchenwald, is the "man-with-the-book" who boldly calls out from his cell the good word for the day. And above all - - - who can think of Jesus of Nazareth without thinking of Him as He laid down His life program that day in the synagogue with the Book in His hands?

Is it too much to say that Martin Luther lived his years chiefly with the shadow of such a Christ cast upon him? As God's Great Galilean charted His course by dedication born from a scriptural text, so the Friar of Wittenberg considered himself captive to God's Word.

This is the image of Luther which must remain, since it is as the Man-With-The-Book that he made his contribution for all time. In a certain sense the favorable light that some Roman Catholic brethren are

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now placing upon him may be stemming from their new emphasis upon the Scriptures, and who knows but what in our life-time we may see the sting of excommunication taken away from him. Are there not already those who have said warm-souled things of Pope John 23 as they referred to something of a Luther spirit in the man - - - implying in no uncertain way that had he been Pope in Luther's day there would not have been the "tragic necessity" of the Reformation!

Significantly enough, Bishop Otto Dibelius in his last Reformation Day sermon (1966) began by saying:

"If the Roman Catholic Church had looked like it does now 450 years ago, then there would never have been a Reformation in Germany. No doubt there would have been differences within the church and concerning the church, but the German people would have been spared the tragic fate of being split into two halves, Protestant and Catholic.

"This was not God's will. But neither was it His will - that is, if we interpret the signs of our times aright - that this division should last forever. He desired that the two churches should draw closer to one another, that they should gradually come to realize what they owe to each other as churches of Jesus - until at last they

join together again.

"This will take time. But we are thankful that the first steps in this direction have already been taken, and rejoice at every sign that in certain questions both churches hold the same views and bear witness together.

"One thing held in common is the maxim that a church of Jesus Christ must be constantly re-formed."

According to the chiefest of Reformers, the Scriptures must ever been seen as the norm for all renewal.

We are greatly encouraged by our dialogue with Rome, and we have a right to make much of this spirit called ecumenism. But a word of fair warning, I dare say, can be in order. It is recalled as the preparation which Martin Luther made for what was intended to be the first ecumenical dialogue with Rome (or so we might refer to it.)

Remember what he did in the Smalcald Articles? Written in 1537, they constituted a posture as he anticipated the council that was being summoned for the following year. He divided the articles of Faith into three main parts.

First he mentions "the sublime articles of the divine majesty": the trinitarian and Christological dogma. With a kind of sigh of relief he declared that these articles "are in no contention or dispute. There-

fore, we have not to discuss them at present."

In the second place he touched upon the main articles of the Christian Faith which teaches that Jesus Christ alone is our salvation and that we are justified by faith in Him alone, together with the consequences of this doctrine: the rejection of the propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass, the invocation of the saints, and the claims of the papacy. As far as these are concerned, Luther made it quite plain that there can be no possible compromise.

Then he went on to a third division where he felt discussion is possible and necessary with "learned and sensible men" from the Roman Church or "even among ourselves." So he mentioned at this point all the great doctrines of the Reformation: sin and repentance, Law and Gospel, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Office of the Keys, Confession, and even the doctrine of justification.

It has been quite correctly observed that the "seeming contradiction between Luther's preparedness to enter into a serious doctrinal discussion with Roman Catholic theologians and his uncompromising "NO" to the papacy is nothing else but the SIC et NON of the Reformation: the YES to everything that is in accordance with the Word of God, wherever it is found, even in the papal church, and the uncompromising NO to everything that is contrary to God's Word, even in our own denomination" (Hermann Sasse.)

A final word about ourselves and our day. We have been told that

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we live in the Post-Protestant era. In fact a noted theologian some few years ago wrote a book which he, so we are told, wished to be properly titled as "The End of The Protestant Era." The publishers, so we are told, advised against it, believing that our generation was not quite ready to think in such terms!

But who will contest very vigorously such an attitude today? And what does it really mean?

Does it mean that the Reformation has run its course, served its purpose? Does it mean optimism, made credulous by Rome's renewal? Dare one mention in an expansive mood the two Vatican Councils, the updating in Rome by the Good Pope John XXIII's Open Window, and the end of the Protestant era in the same breath? If so, let all praise and honor be given to the reformers' emphasis upon the primacy of the Scriptures!

On the other hand if what is meant by the "end of the Protestant era" is the take-over in our day of the humanists, the secularists and the materialists so that any genuine interest in the "sola fide" and the "sola scriptura" is passe, then we must look and look for another Luther, another Calvin.

Ask then how you will recognize him when he appears. Listen, I will tell you. He will be firmly clasping a book - - - THE Book of Books. Follow him!

* * * *

"The proper point from which to begin any discussion about the Bible is, of course, the point from which the Biblical writers themselves began, namely, the world we have to live in. The Bible is essentially a book about our human situation in a bewildering and perplexing universe.

"It may seem to us that the particular stage in history which we have now reached is one which presents unparalleled difficulties. Indeed, at first sight the political and economic helplessness of Christendom, and its apparent inability to solve its problems, would seem to suggest that some demonic power is bent on its destruction. We are all only too well aware that the stupendous advances in scientific knowledge and achievement during the last century ought to have resulted in a richer and more spacious life for mankind. Instead of that we find ourselves consecrating our highest ingenuity to the task of mutual destruction. We stagger from one crisis to another and look with gloomy foreboding for more disasters still to come.

"It is inevitable, amid the general disappearance of stability and loss of a sense of purpose, that ethical standards should also become a casualty. So long as there seems to be a fixed pattern of life, public and private morality finds its place within it. When thinly disguised chaos holds the reins in political and economic affairs, the same spectre controls codes of behaviour. Petty dishonesty, sexual laxity and social irresponsibility tend to be regarded not as breaches of principle but as

matters of small import to be avoided only when there is a likelihood of unpleasant consequences.

"There is little point in trying to apportion the cause of this situation between the aftermath of war, the ineffectiveness of the church and the widespread break-down of family life. There is, however, some point in recognizing that our plight holds no radically new ingredients. The rot may be at the moment more widespread, but history shows such a perennial recurrence of blinded vice and folly that we are not entitled to feel that there is anything incurable in our present situation.

"To say boldly that the cure lies in a return to the Bible is perhaps to invite derision or pity, yet it is with that conviction that this book is written. It is not designed as an academic inquiry but as an attempt to show the relevance and freshness of the Biblical answer to the problems of a human situation which may seem to us peculiarly depressing but which is in essence little different from what it has always been."

- - William Neill: The Rediscovery of The Bible:
Chapter I;
Harper and Brothers, New York,
1954

November 5, 1967

"THE CHURCH: GOD'S PEOPLE"

Today, next Sunday and the Sunday after that, when we come to this, God's House, we'll be thinking at this particular period of the meaning of the Church. Each of these three sermons is based upon the general theme: The Church. Today's sermon, "The Church: God's People" and the text, I Peter, the second chapter, portions of the 9th and 10th verses:

"For you are a chosen race....
Once you were no people but now
you are God's people . . ."

Those of us who began our ministry in the early 1940's had the good fortune to come under the tutelage of the President of our Church, the Rev. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, recognized perhaps in many quarters of Christendom as the leader of the non-Roman Christian world. He is a giant, committed servant of the Lord Jesus.

As I recall the times when I have had the good fortune to hear him, there are two times that stand out above all the others. Once I heard him preach about the primary task of the Church, evangelism. The primary task is to witness, putting it very plainly, to win souls for Jesus Christ.

The more recent time that I heard him speak, with the eloquence from on high, was a year ago this past spring when he came as the official representative of the Lutheran Church in America to our Maryland Synod Convention as we met in Gettysburg. He was assigned in the convention schedule to two periods. Presumably he was to talk about the program of the Lutheran Church. Someone very wisely suggested that for his second presentation he might give us what we might refer to as a "State Of The Church" address, endeavoring as

best he could to put his finger upon the pulsebeat of the Church, her mission and her work in today's world. It was a very sobering presentation, and we caught the under-current that he was perfectly aware of all the negativism that is abroad throughout the world, in which there are people saying things about the Church that would lead us to believe that maybe the Church isn't really as good as once we thought it was.....echoing perhaps what has been said in certain quarters of the world, that maybe God Himself is going to scrap the Church. And if He doesn't scrap the Church, then God will look elsewhere for the witness in the world, that we might be where the action is. These are troubling, sobering things.

He let us know, however, very definitely, that he didn't know of any institution that could survive on the face of the earth with the same degree of intensity of criticism that was being given the Church, and if it weren't by the grace of God, we might have lost it.

Now, more recently, it's not at all surprising to pick up the LUTHERAN, the most recent issue, and to find something of this echo of Dr. Fry's voice. He had gone to Minnesota to dedicate some buildings in our seminary out there. In connection with that, he took advantage of the opportunity to suggest that we declare a moratorium against our reckless remarks about the Church, that we would have what I presume you might say, a quieting time, a quieting-down period. Not that Dr. Fry, surely those of us who know him -- not that he would stifle constructive criticism. This is always in order. But as anyone who has dealt on the basis of inter-personal relationships knows, there comes a time when everybody ought to quite, and we just hear some other voice than our own.

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Those who are counsellors know that when two people come into the counciling room, and each one is so quick to tell his side of the story, that it's a wise counsellor who may let them speak for a while, and then he may very wisely suggest, "Well, why don't you just allow yourself a quiet period, when maybe together you might see things, when maybe together you might hear things." This is always the problem, you know, between us and other people.

Interestingly enough, when the Church was young, they had their problems, and this great man of God, the Big Fisherman, the Apostle Peter, was writing a letter to some troubled Christians. They were suffering a great deal of anguish about the church. They weren't quite certain of anything any more, and I suppose if they could speak to our day they might say that there were those who said to them, "Well maybe God is going to get along without us, too, and maybe even God doesn't think as much of the Church as once He did."

Well, this great man of God wrote a letter, and he said something to people who belonged to the church that we need to hear all over again in our day. He said, "You are a chosen people." He said, "Once you were no people." "Now," he says, "You are God's people." Now this is what you and I need to hear God say to us. With all of our weaknesses, with all of our limitations, with all of our feet made of lumps of clay that begin to crack and to crumble, with all of our halos that begin to tilt....God is saying to us, "But I choose you, and you belong to me."

Every now and then a man needs the thrill of knowing that he's possessed, that is, that he belongs to somebody, that he belongs to something. A man is known by the loyalties that claim him....a man's life is fashioned by the allegiances that control his endeavors. Now when you and I think about the

Church, and in this, the first sermon in the series, I beg you to see it in this way: the Church isn't something that belongs to us. The Church is something that belongs to Jesus Christ. It's not ours; it's God's. That's why, whether you read it or not -- hopefully we print it there that you might read it, there's an extract or two from the sermon that's ab out to be preached when you next come to God's House. That sentence or two that appeared on this week's issue of the MESSENGER has words by deliberate design printed in italicized fashion. The first sentence reads like this:

" . . . the church understood itself as
the people of God . . . "

....and the italicized words are 'of God.' And lest you might not gain the full understanding of that, there was a complementary sentence that went on to complete the thought:

" . . . They knew themselves to be a company
possessed, and the measure of their obedience
to Him was the hall-mark of their distinctive-
ness . . . "

Whenever you start to think about the Church and try to get it in its clear and proper perspective, begin at that point: it's something that belongs to God. A great scholar who is dealing with the Church has read his Bible very carefully, and he's come up with the idea that, in the New Testament at least, there are thirty different figures of speech referring to the Church, and each of them with the element of possession, each of them making it perfectly plain that the Church is something that belongs to God.

You know how some of those figures of speech are expressed....

" . . the body - - of Christ"

" . . the bride - - of Christ"

" . . the people - - of God"

There are those who in their understanding of the Church have gone so far as to say that, properly understood, the Church in today's world is as the projection of Jesus Christ, that everything that Jesus Christ said and did while He was here on earth, He's now entrusted to the Church - - that the Church should be in today's world as Jesus Christ.

It's a thrilling thing, then, to see yourself as one who is possessed. This makes all the difference in the world in certain people's lives, when they're given to understand what is their true nature, what is their true character, and the stock from which they stem. Maybe this is part of the problem with the Church today.....we're so busy, so busy with so many things, that we become confounded, confused and bewildered. When all that we need to do is just to take time, to get this thing in proper perspective. The Church, properly understood, is never a human institution. It's made up of people, who are human.....but it's God's! God ordained the Church.....God established the Church. The Church was God's idea!

Now there are two things to be kept in mind. The Church is made up of people who have responded to the call of God. There's a strange-sounding word that we have in our vocabulary, and it ought to remain there -- it's not English.....it is ekklesia, which refers to the Church as the "people who have been called." And that's the way it was at the very beginning. God has seen fit to call certain people. Oh, that doesn't mean that God

has His favorites, and that doesn't mean that God particularly passes over other people - - - all that God is He ever is. And God is never less than love, and His love is going out to all the world.

But there are those who respond as others do not respond, and this makes the difference. The difference in any situation is always determined by the degree and the quality of the response that's given to something that's being initiated. When you read the Bible -- what is the Bible but God's call to men and man's response? -- I think you can put it that way if you want to.....God calling to us, and our response.

In the pages of the Old Testament you come across a man, Abraham, who became the Father of the Chosen People, and all of that happened because Abraham responded to a call that was given to him, even though he did not know the full nature of the consequences, he only knew that God called.

Then when you move on to the pages of the New Testament, you are introduced to Jesus Christ, who was never less than God, and wherever He went there were those who sensed something....and the transformation in their lives depended on the response that they gave to the call that He made.

You know what I'm trying to do, don't you? I'm trying to bring into proper focus your right understanding of yourself. You are someone who has responded to a call. You are in the church because of the claim of Jesus Christ upon your life. Oh, you may not always talk about it this way, you may not even spell it out this way for those who are nearest and dearest to you, but precisely in God's sight that's what you're meant to be. And every single one of us ought to understand himself in that light. We're in the church because we've heard God's call, and the church is made up of

those who respond to Him.

It's almost too good to believe, isn't it, that of all the people on the face of the earth we should be that fortunate, to be numbered among those who have responded to Him?

Now the next thing that has to be said: as the Church is made up of those who respond to Him, then what is the hallmark, what is their distinctive characteristic? How will the world know that we are numbered among those who respond? I tell you, it will be according to the measure of our obedience, as they detect in us our obedience to Him. And this is what we must always be about. We must always be trying to figure out: what is it that God wants us to do? And then when we respond, let it be the response of an obedient soul to God!

Now let me do my best to clear up a little bit of fuzzy thinking on the part of some people. I'm not so sure that it's a good thing that people should always associate the name of certain personalities with a certain church. Oh, I can understand how it happens. Don't ever sell short the strength of personality. God has seen fit to work especially through certain people, and this is one reason why we can say He endows them and permits certain gifts and skills, and if they are truly committed, they cannot help but bear His stamp, and the stamp that they make might be associated with their temperament and their personality. But don't ever make the mistake of believing that the Church of Jesus Christ begins and ends with human personality. This congregation is enriched by those of you who have particular gifts, personality-wise and temperament-wise -- honestly so. But this church does not depend upon personality. This church depends upon Jesus Christ.

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Which leads me to say to you most earnestly, let it be clearly understood in your own mind that when you come here on a Sunday morning, you do not come aright unless you come in response to the call of Jesus Christ. This is God's House. We are God's people. And there was a day when we said it ever so reverently, and let's hope we can still say it, that we came on God's Day -- to hear God's Word -- to sing God's praise -- to receive God in the Sacrament, and to offer to God our gifts.

And all of this leads me to say in another sense, that whenever you read in the MESSENGER, whenever you hear an announcement such as was made from the lectern today, these are invitations that come to you, perhaps channeled through human personality, but the invitation is God's, the mouthpiece is God's agent. Which simply means that every time you say Yes, you say Yes to Him who is the Head of the Church -- every time you say No, you say No to Him who is the Head of the Church.

In this congregation we are always grateful for those who pray as they plan....who pray as they purpose....who pray as they participate -- that within human limitation, all that we purpose may be something that's pleasing in God's sight. The older I become, the more I recognize my debt to the Church. I can't possibly picture the work of Jesus Christ without the Church -- God can't possibly picture His work without the Church. God wants His work to be done, so God says, I will choose a people.

Now, equally thrilling is this happy prospect: that because we are God's people, God is always giving us the gift of His Holy Spirit, God is always helping us, so that one day, when you and I may be removed from the earthly scene, from Heaven above we could look back and say, "It was God's

doing."

Let's not wait until that hour should come. Why can't we look now with the eyes of the Holy Spirit.....today.....and see what God is allowing us to do together. It's a thrilling thing to belong to someone, and never more thrilling when that someone to whom you belong is God.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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November 12, 1967

PERTINENT REMARKS - "PROJECT NOW"

The sermon originally scheduled months ago to be preached at this hour, for reasons that will become increasingly obvious, will not be preached, but rather during this sermon period you are invited to listen to a series of pertinent remarks, the text for which, and the direct application thereof, will be made at the end of the sermon period. Now to begin.

Perhaps one could best begin by turning back the pages of the calendar to those weeks in mid-summer when your Senior Pastor went on vacation, back to the hills-of-home, two hundred miles from here in north central Pennsylvania. It was not a vacation in the ordinary sense of the word. It was not intended to be that kind of vacation this year. It was a time given to serious study and reflection. So day after day and week by week, back to the study shack, known as the Kluttzhaus, I concerned myself with a particular responsibility.

The impetus had come from the East Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, an invitation to deliver an address on the general theme: "The Mission of The Church in Suburbia" and to share the platform with an exponent on the mission of the Church in an urban situation. So week after week and day after day there were the books to be read, the notes to be taken, and then hour after hour given to reflection, until some kind of statement could evolve.

But all the while this was going on, there was the awareness of being one who would return to his own parish, the trip back from the hills-of-home

to Silver Spring, and to face the prospect of another year's work here. For there's no sense talking about the mission of the Church in suburbia if one cannot make practical application to the situation in which he happens to find himself.

When your Senior Pastor came back, it was as though he had been called all over again to the work of Jesus Christ in this place. He shared his thoughts with members of the Committee on Needs, Facilities and Concerns....

...don't ever allow yourself to believe that that very important committee in the life of this church concerns itself with only brick and mortar -- it's the Committee on Needs, Concerns, Facilities, and we talk about facilities only because we first give proper regard to our needs and our concerns..... They listened sympathetically to what was being proposed.

Then to different committees, then an intimation with members of the staff, and then Church Council....not any of these perhaps in proper sequence, but this is the path that's been taken to this very moment. We talked about a number of things that we felt God was placing upon us in this hour in our history. The net result is a program called PROJECT NOW. That's the best possible term we seemed to be able to give to it.

You ought to know what PROJECT NOW involves. It involves even more than what you're reading in the insert that you happen to have in your hands. It involves even more than what you've read in the MESSENGER before you came to this place. PROJECT NOW involves, and properly so at the very beginning,

an enlistment of completely dedicated people in the course of the year who would be willing to accept what we might refer to as a "spiritual discipline"....

...who will go on record that every single day they will study the Bible, in whatever manner they choose....
...and that every single day they will enter into a spiritual league with other members in praying for the cause of Jesus Christ at home and abroad, and particularly as it's to be expressed through this congregation....

....they will also, as a disciplined group, be asked to identify with people who are in need, and also to assume the responsibility of speaking to other people in the course of the year about their relationship to Jesus Christ.

Now this will be unfolded gradually in the course of the year -- enlisting a corps of people who will permit themselves to observe a spiritual discipline.

PROJECT NOW also will include, not heretofore mentioned, and only as we are able to do it, an alignment between this parish and with a parish in the inner city. Oh, we have been trying to do this for some time. We tried to do it with our nearest Lutheran neighbor in the District of Columbia, and we had a series of conversations, whereby we would say to them, How can we walk together in the challenges that God puts in front of us as

two different congregations....and if perchance your need should be greater, how can we share our staff and our people?

....our first efforts have died aborning. We're sorry to have to advise you. But there are other congregations and we shall not give up the attempt in hoping to do this kind of thing -- a very vital thing, but it has to be done gradually and slowly. That's also part of PROJECT NOW.

The material that you have already received tells you that part of PROJECT NOW calls for an expanded ministry to youth. And because this is the new emphasis -- oh, in all of our support of Kingdom work, there has to be the sustaining quality of all programs heretofore established. But this year, and as we face the years that are yet to come, an emphasis on an expanded ministry to youththe word to underline is expanded.

If I didn't have the good fortune to be associated with you, I would be ever so much more distraught when I look out over the world scene, for it's not a happy picture, especially when one thinks of those who are young. It's a sad and miserable picture.....

....I have in front of me a copy of LIFE magazine, a very recent issue. The cover story is "Runaway Kids." If you've read it, you already know what I'm going to tell you -- 16% more youngsters have run away now than any preceding year, and equally frightening and alarming is that this year there are more girls running away than there have been boys. It's always a pathetic thing when a kid runs away, for ever too often the road for the runaway can be

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a dead-end street, the road of the runaway can end in Hell.
....I have also in front of me this copy of PARADE magazine,
a very recent issue. On the front page, reference to a story,
an account, "The Plight of American Youth"...and the title:
"No More Heroes." The thousand and more young people who
were interviewed were asked a question something like this:
Name the people whom you most admire. That was about the
effect of the question. Now brace yourself. Half of those
who answered said, "We haven't any heroes."
Some of us know very well that whatever good may be lurking
in our souls is lurking there because of the inspiration of
somebody we've met and liked who have inspired us. We're
made that way, that we need heroes. As I stand among you now
I could name certain people right now that the two boys whom I
love most in this world mention by name with respect and with
honor. And little may they realize how great has been their
influence upon their lives.....I could tell you what it's
meant to me to have someone cross my path at a critical period
in life, who commanded respect, and at the memory of that
perons even today I find myself wanting to be far better than
I am.

Now with this as a kind of background, let me tell you that in Saint
Luke Church we've tried not to fail an obligation to minister to young
people. There are those of you right now, within the hearing of my voice,

who have served as youth advisors, who have participated in the youth program. Are you aware of the fact that three of our staff members right now spend the greater amount of their time working in programming affecting young people.....

- - the Choirmaster and Organist....of all his choral groups, only one is for adults. The others, touching a number more than one hundred people, are 18 years of age and under. And when he came to us we made it perfectly plain to him that he wasn't simply to conduct a choir rehearsal, but he was to touch their lives in the name of Jesus Christ, and he had this responsibility to minister to them....
- - in our program of Christian Education....unfortunately the fact has to be called by name, the smallest segment touched by Christian Education in this parish are the adults. In our total Christian Education emphasis, by far the greater part are those 18 years of age and under. This, too, is the youth program in this parish....
- - and when we called an Assistant Pastor we gave him to understand that he was to come and spend by far the greater amount of his time and his energy among those who are young....he's the Assistant Pastor in charge of Youth Work. That's why you don't see him here right now, that's why you don't see him in the chancel at 9:30....because at 9:30 and at 11:00 o'clock we've discovered there are

areas, no matter how limited, that involve young people,
where he ought to be.

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But no one can ever say this is enough. And so we talk about our expanded ministry to youth. You'll hear about it. The men who are planning to serve as visitors can tell you the story and will carry with them a brochure that you have yet to see, as fine a thing of its kind as I have seen, thanks to those members of our staff and members of the congregation who made it possible. Look at it very carefully, and particularly the cover. We went through Rudy Schuetzler's photographic files and came up with a picture of a perfectly lovely, charming teenage girl, the personification of grace and beauty....because by deliberate intent this is the kind of person we'd like to offer in the name of the church. This kind of person lies behind our every objective. Oh, I can't tell her name — I wish I could tell you she's a member of the parish...but just the personification that she reveals becomes our objective.

Now how do we plan to expand our ministry to youth? In three ways. Listen carefully.

We would like to establish a "care center" -- or if you want to use the term, use it very advisedly, a "half-way house." I'm not so sure that's the better term. But we'd like to pay the rent, or we'd like to find the house in Montgomery County or in Prince George's County, which would be staffed by completely qualified and dedicated house parents, a man and a woman, who would provide a Christian setting, a Christian atmosphere, where a teenager emotionally disturbed, or where the pressure is on, might be able

to live for a limited period of time until he gets his proper perspective, until his parents get their proper perspective.

Would you permit an element or two that's highly autobiographical.... for a man has a right to speak out of his own experience. I know whereof I speak.

Winifred and I, in the years that God has allowed us to live in parsonages, have found ourselves with God-given opportunities, in a very limited way, to know that this kind of thing can work. I could refer to two case studies if you'd like.

It was the mother on her dying bed, actually so, who said to me, "Pastor, watch out for my boys," and she spoke far better than she might have realized, far better than I knew. For after she was gone, here was the father completely bewildered, left by himself with these two youngsters. We took them into our home. It was a completely difficult period for them and for him, but they needed this interim time. The story has a precious ending. One of them became a minister of the Gospel....the other is an executive director of a YMCA.

Then there was the youngster who found himself getting in the hair of his stepmother. It was like fire every time -- just to walk across the room never suited her. She married his father and she found herself with a built-in family already on her hand, and a pesky teenager at that....who never quite knew that socks could be washed....who never quite knew that a room didn't have to be ruffled. So he came and lived with us, till the heat was off, and until they saw themselves in proper perspective. And that story also has a happy ending.

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Tressler Lutheran Home for Children has always been highly regarded, an agency that cares for children, particularly orphans. They no longer have the institutional ministry that they once had in Pennsylvania, even though it's supported by synods, including Maryland. They have an endowment, they still receive funds. Now they're trying to establish a program. We have had conversations with the Executive Director; we've set up a meeting with the chairman and members of a committee on child services. We're exploring the possibility of having Tressler come in and offer the expertise for this emotional teenage care center, to do what we could do in this regard. The chairman of the committee said it could mean, as far as we're concerned, investing \$18,000 a year in this program. They would never have talked like that -- I think I can tell you this -- if we had not taken the initiative. This program is only a beginning stage. We're not making promises beyond the present moment -- we know we ought only to begin, and we know the direction which under God we ought to move. This is one phase.

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A second phase: Pastor Naegele and I, ordained ministers, try to counsel as many young people as we can. We haven't enough time. And we also know our limitations. Neither one of us pretends to be anything but what he happens to be. And there comes a time when we're out of our depth. Saint Luke Church now has reached the point where she ought to have the services of a trained, qualified, Christian-oriented counsellor. And again I'm saying advisedly, we're simply beginning. We would like to purchase the services of such a person who might come here, according to our need, according to our funds, perhaps once a week, twice a week, and then do in

depth and in a very able manner the counselling to a teenager or to his parents.

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The third phase: As significant as anything that's done in our youth program is the week that we spend at Mar Lu Ridge, the third week in August. We began eight or nine years ago in a very modest way. We almost had more staff than we had youngsters. We only had four boys that year, and I remember there were four of us adults who were with those four boys. The girls almost had the same percentage. Now we have an enrollment, a total enrollment that's between the fifties and the sixties. We can do in one week at Mar Lu Ridge, living with youngsters constantly day after day, we can do with them in one week, in a certain sense, more than we do in the half-hour to three-quarters of an hour once a week in the course of an entire year through a program right here. We'd like to expand that. We'd like to offer a second week. The time ought even to come when we would require every youngster who is going to be confirmed to spend a week in such a situation with the staff of this church. And who knows but that the program could grow, and expand. We might be able somewhere, somehow, if we had the facility -- we have the staff -- to provide a summer program in which we could go into the inner city and offer a program specifically for youngsters who would come to us for that kind of setting.

We're also convinced that there are youngsters who need to be ministered to in a small-group situation. Pastor and I are now conducting retreats at Bethany on Friday nights for last year's confirmands. We know the inestimable good that comes out of a group of six or eight as they're

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gathered together. I have in my files a letter that was written last year by one of our teenagers. I prize it for two reasons. One reason is, it's the kind of letter I think I could see myself writing when I was his age. He takes the church all apart, and gives us to understand, according to his point of view, that we failed him. The truth of the matter is, he didn't identify with the full program as we offer it, yet I'm convinced that the need that seemed to be apparent in his life could have been met in a small-group situation that could have been offered him once or twice in the course of the year, where he could have stood to benefit from the cross-fertilization of mind and spirit of trusted qualified adult leadership.

The other letter Pastor Naegele got, from one of the youngsters confirmed last year, as he shared the substance with me -- it's an exceptionally fine letter, in which the youngster is clamoring for even more things that have been offered, particularly for her age group. And one of the things she's mentioned is the opportunity to have a small group situation.

Now these are the phases of our expanded ministry to youth. If you want, it all depends according to your stance. You could find reasons that would cause you to believe that we ought not to do this. I have lived long enough to find any number of reasons why people shouldn't do anything, particularly if it means getting up and moving forward. I simply know that God expects us to do something, and that God knows the direction in which we ought to move. And that's the stance of your Church Council, it's the stance

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of your several committees, and that's the stance of your church staff. Surely by this time, after my talking to you for 23 1/2 minutes, there should be no question as to where I stand. You're being invited to give your full-hearted response. God expects us to do His work at home and abroad, and even though we stretch out to concern ourselves with people who are not members of this parish, God also expects us to do something for people who are. It's never a case of either/or -- it's a case of both/and. And in this brochure that you can read for yourself, you'll find a full program, a total program, modest increases in every aspect of our work. But now the new thrust, an expanded ministry to youth.

Now I told you there was a Scriptural reference. It goes back to the 6th chapter of John. Our Lord Jesus Christ called to His disciples, called to their attention a problem. There were people who needed to be fed, there were people who needed to have compassion shown them. It's the incident of the feeding of the five thousand.

He first made them aware of the problem....and then He said, "How many loaves do you have?"...as much as to say, "Let's do something now, and you get into the action." Now that's the Scriptural reference.

Have you caught its implication? I'd like to salute one member of this congregation, who when having heard about PROJECT NOW, also heard me say, weeks ago: "It's quite an undertaking -- maybe we'd better wait until next year." And immediately the response was, "If you're going to call it PROJECT NOW, then let's do it now."

I don't pose as a prophet, but I'd like to tell you that as I see it, nothing could be more significant for us in this decade than to undertake this phase of our work. God has given tomorrow to those who are young. They tell me that the largest single group of men to be enlisted in the visitation

program are helping in this response. If for some reason you haven't been given a chance to respond, don't hesitate to let Irv Zorb or Art Lovell know of your willingness to tell the story.

Now as you refer to the blue sheet, we are asking for those visitors who are present at this service -- they've been commissioned at each of our morning hours, to come forward to the chancel step.....

(These remarks transcribed as recorded)

"THE CHURCH: FELLOWSHIP IN FAITH"

Some thirty years ago Dr. Charles M. Jacobs, the President of our Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, went repeatedly to the chapel, and there from the pulpit shared with the students preparing for the Gospel ministry his thoughts and reflections on the Christian faith. In reality it was a series of devotional studies on the Apostles' Creed. And once the series had been completed there were those who had been so greatly impressed that they beseeched him to have his series put in print. The book has found its way on the shelves of many a preacher's library. It remains as a treasured volume on the shelf where I put my books.

Speaking of the Church, he has this very significant thing to say. Bear with me now as I read a paragraph for you.

"Now take that idea and expand it, and you will reach the Christian conception of the Church. There are multitudes of men in the world who have given their allegiance to Jesus Christ, and through Him to God. They have accepted as their own goals that which the allegiance implies. They are pledged to the same purposes and they pursue them with whatever power they have and by whatever light, even though the power be small and the light be dim. They have a common faith, and a common desire to see God's purposes accomplished in them and by them and by all the world. All of that common purposes makes them a communion of saints. It is as real as the family or as the state. But no one can know that unless he belongs to it. The moment he is in it, he becomes sure of it. The moment he becomes sure of it, he is in it."

Alas for many people, however, they do not have a full and proper understanding of what the Church is. This is one reason why you and I must go

back occasionally and refresh our minds as to what, in the mind of God, the Church was meant to be. Because it is through the Church that the Gospel comes to us, we may sometimes forget about the Gospel and think only of ourselves. We may magnify erroneously the aspect of the Church as a human institution. Whatever the Church is not, she most certainly is not a human institution. She is divinely ordained -- she is the Bride of Christ. But the treasure which God gives us He gives to us who are earthly, earthen vessels. And because this happens to be true, occasionally we have our disillusionment, our disappointment with the Church.

But then we gain a measure of comfort when we remember that the Church belongs to Jesus Christ. It is His idea, it is His gift to us. And then when we begin to see it all over again through His eyes, we find our rightful handling of it and our rightful place in it.

There is no better way to understand what the Church was meant to be than to read the pages of the New Testament, for God's understanding of the Church, written largely as the New Testament is being written. The New Testament, in a certain sense, is the unfolding of the Church. There's a magnificent picture of the Church in the 4th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, I was so intrigued and so impressed that I chose as a springboard for this sermon a text from that 4th chapter, in which there's a wonderful tribute being paid the Church: it's referred to as "the company of believers, who were of one mind and one heart." You can't say it in any more precious way than that...."a company of believers, of one mind and of one heart"

Now quite parenthetically for the moment at least, let it be fully understood that when you talk about a believer, in the New Testament, you are never

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talking about a single person. By the same token, when the New Testament talks about a saint, you are never talking about a single person. The New Testament knows nothing whatever about a single believer -- the New Testament knows nothing at all about a single saint. The New Testament knows only believers and saints -- in the plural sense. For there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. Don't let anyone fool you and tell you that he can be a full follower of Jesus Christ and not be identified with the Church. For the Church is the God-ordained company of those who are the followers of Jesus Christ, and when you have your pencil in hand and you read this page in the New Testament, you underline the word company -- a company of believers of one mind and of one spirit.

A man needs the fellowship of other people in order to mature. You and I need each other in the company of faith. We can never rise to our full stature in Christ single-handed and walking it by ourselves and alienating ourselves from the company of believers. It just can't be done. And whatever reason it may be that brought you to this place today, it could be a valid reason, I suggest, if you were saying to yourself, "If I am to rise to my fullest stature in Christ, I must be there, for there is something that happens in the corporate expression of the Christian faith that does not happen any other time or in any other way."

But what happens, now, I ask you, when the Church falls short of what she was meant to be? You may read in the 4th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles how they were referred to as a company of believers of one mind and one heart, and so united, mark you, that they said: "Everything that we have belongs to Jesus Christ." -- the first real valid experiment in communal liv-

ing is accounted for in the 4th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. They were like-minded, so possessed by a common spirit they said, "Everything that we have belongs to everyone."

But what do you do now, when the Church forgets what she was meant to become? What do you do? This was the problem that the Apostle Paul had on his hands on many an occasion. It's a rather distressing thing to read certain pages of the New Testament, to discover all the bitterness and the strife and the enmity that took place within the Christian Church. In the 14th chapter of his Letters to the Christians at Rome he comes head-on with this problem, and he recognizes the fact that here was a group of Christians who just couldn't agree on almost anything....

...they couldn't agree on the Lord's Supper -- not so much what it meant as to how to receive it and how often to receive it.....

...they couldn't agree as to what day of the week ought to be observed as the Lord's Day.....

And because they had problems on their hands like this, they faced one another with contempt and scorn, and they allowed themselves to look upon each other with embittered eyes. What terrible imagery they had of each other, as though each one carried around a set of horns and a pitchfork. I am accounting for you something that you can read for yourself in the page of the New Testament. When God has this precious thing in mind for us, when God wanted us to be a company of believers, when God wanted us to be of one mind and one spirit.....what then do you do when you have a situation like that? Well, God raises up His spokesman -- in this case it was the Apostle Paul -- and so Paul sets them straight.

And how does he set them straight? Not so much by reminding them of their differences, but reminding them of what they had in common.

And this is why so often we make so little progress. If we don't magnify our differences we nurse them along. And there are some people who become secure only if they can hold on to something that's different. They just don't want to believe the better thing. What psychological blocks some people carry around in their mind, and in doing so they become secure, so secure that they paint themselves into a corner and never quite know how to extricate themselves.

So the Apostle Paul, that magnanimous soul in Jesus Christ, comes and makes plain to them that they ought to talk about the things that they had in common -- such as their need for a Saviour! That's how they got into the Church in the first place -- every single one of them knew himself as a sinner saved by grace. You've heard me say it, haven't you, as I've echoed the voice of the man who was Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church on the Sunday when he received into the membership of that congregation the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Charles Evan Hughes, and a group of other people, among them a lowly charwoman.....his eloquent statement: "The ground is level at the foot of the Cross"-- every single one of us stands on level ground when we come into the presence of Jesus Christ.

So the Apostle Paul reminds us that whether you fail to recognize it or not, that's what this marvelous liturgy of our church does for us every Sunday when we come -- in the dignified language of the Church, before we do anything else...."We poor sinners confess unto Thee -- " And that's a collective personal pronoun. It takes every single one of us into the picture.

So the Apostle Paul would remind them what they had in common at the very beginning -- every single person a sinner saved by grace.

He also reminded them that there is only one Judge. This is our weakness...

...we are the people who consign people to Hell....

...we are the people who keep our images of them.....

....we are the ones who fail to believe that God can work

miracles in human hearts.....

....we are the ones who aren't willing to allow the Holy Spirit to take over.....

What victories could be won in your life, and in my life, if we'd allow judgment to remain in the hands of God. So the Apostle Paul reminded them -- "These are the things we have in common."

How they must have felt when they remembered how they greeted one another sometimes with hate in their eyes, and how sometimes they refused to speak to one another! --- to recognize one another --- so quick to condemn one another. Said the Apostle Paul, "But these are the things we have in common! Every one of us needs Christ! No man can go it by himself. Every single one of us needs the Church! Let's not hinder what God is trying to do in and through His Church."

As some of you know, I have a very high regard for Alcoholics Anonymous. On occasion I've attended their meeting and been tremendously impressed. There's a member of this congregation who says to me that when he attends a meeting of the Alcoholics Anonymous, there are times when he knows a rapport, an identity, a fellowship that he does not know when he comes here. This

could be an indictment against us.

Upon reflection, I say to myself, I know what he says is true as far as rapport and identity and fellowship, and even use the word koinonea, within Alcoholics Anonymous. Why? Because every single one who is within that group knows that he got there by the same road -- every single one who is part of that fellowship knows that each of them has had a similar experience. ...every single one who is part of that group knows his dependence, as they put it, upon a Higher Power. And what is not to be forgotten is that every single person who is in that group knows that to all intents and purposes, every other person, as he would have the strength and the capacity, also has the willingness to help him in his time of need -- to help, not to hinder. And this is the frightening thing, that in the time of Judgment how much God may reveal to us, how often those of us who are within the Family of God hindered and did not help.

When God had the Church in mind, He had in mind fellowship in faith, a very precious thing which man sorely needs. God never made man to exist as a solitary human. He made him as a social being. He was meant to be gathered together in company. And if you want a simple working definition of the Church, that's what the Church of Jesus Christ is -- the gathering of individuals who believe in Jesus Christ, give corporate expression of their allegiance, and draw the measure of comfort as the Holy Spirit works in and through His Church. Beloved, this is the precious thing we have in the Church. It's God's idea! It's His gift to us! So every now and then when you sit back and assess your church, that is, this, what may be for

you the most visible expression of it, try to assess it through the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ, and what God has in mind for this congregation.

There are those from the outside who when they look in on us are made aware of our unity in Christ. It does show, shows in many ways. And then occasionally there are those on the outside who, when they look upon us, magnify any element that falls short of the genuine fellowship in the Faith.

In the final analysis, when each of us appears before God, it will be a common prayer - - "Lord, have mercy." And until then, why not go on praying another common prayer....."Lord, guide us by Thy truth that we may live and work in love." In a world that's broken by strife and rent asunder, with all my heart and soul I honestly believe that the one shining light that remains is the Church of Jesus Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE CHURCH: BODY OF CHRIST"

The text is from what could be called one of the most difficult letters that the Apostle Paul had to write. It's from the 12th chapter of his First Letter to the Christians at Corinth, it's the 27th verse:

"You are the body of Christ, and
individually members one of
another."

When the congregation was reading that letter as it arrived from the Apostle Paul, there might have been a ripple throughout the body of people present, a kind of ripple that can be characterized in this manner:

"Who, me? -- not me!" "Yes, you!"

kind of attitude. For if one reads between the lines in this letter that the Apostle Paul writes the Christians at Corinth, he laid them rather low, and made it perfectly plain that he understood the kind of situation that had taken over in Corinth.

It wasn't a very pleasant picture. Of all the groups of Christians in the early days, none perhaps was more divided than the group at Corinth. Divided for a number of different reasons....

Well, as you might suspect, there was the matter of personalities. This is always an ugly thing, when people begin to take sides on the basis of persons. Human nature had its way in Corinth too, and there were people who were saying, "We belong to the Christian Church and we'll follow the teachings of Christ according to Cephas -- as he wrote, as he did, as he said -- that's the way we're going to do it....as much as to say, if you don't believe him,

you're not of us.

...then there were people who said, "Oh, yes, Apollos -- he's the man to be trusted. We'll follow Jesus Christ in his camp."

...then it must have grieved the Apostle Paul a great deal to learn that there were even people singling him out and saying, "Our party is the party of Paul".....

....and then, would you believe it, there was even a group of Christians who dragged Jesus Christ down to the level of earthly leaders, and they said, rather self-righteously, I presume, "We're the Jesus party."

So they were divided, on the basis of personalities, always an ugly thing.

There were other divisions. There was a group of people in Corinth who said, "We can believe in Jesus Christ but we can reject the resurrection." Now for the Apostle Paul, this was the heart of the Christian faith. How well he knew that Jesus Christ was alive! And this caused him a great deal of anguish, to think that there should be this division, theologically speaking.

There were other divisions as well.

So after they had painted for him this very ugly picture, of a church that should be united according to the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ, he must have thrown them for a loop when they read these words: "Why, you're the body of Christ."

Surely it wasn't a compliment, because they did not reflect the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. No compliment, of course not, but a challenge. For the Church must always recognize herself as she is, but she must never

stop at that point. She must see herself as she was meant to be, and as Christ intended her. If she is not acting as the body of Christ, that is not to mean that God doesn't intend her to behave as the Body of Christ.

So you and I come here this morning, as part of the Body of Christ, and we must remind ourselves ever so often of just what that phrase means. I wish I could satisfy your mind completely. It's a figure of speech, which at first blush seems readily understood. But the more you deal with it, the more difficult it is to understand. As I was finishing this sermon yesterday, my study floor was strewn with the books that I had pulled down from the shelves.....as one writer deals with the Greek word and pursues it, and tries to give us all the ramifications of the word body. And then I tried to see it historically, what the Body of Christ as the Church has been down through the years. And then there was also the attempt to understand the term philosophically.

As I stand before you now, I want to treat it in as simple a manner as possible, and I do not presume to give you a theological interpretation or a philosophical understanding of this figure of speech. It is a figure of speech, and very dear to the mind of the greatest of all followers of Jesus Christ, if we may make bold to use such a statement -- to the Apostle Paul.....how often he talked about the Body of Christ. Just what does it mean?

Well, let's begin in this manner. What is the body? A body is what you and I need if in this world we're to get the things done that need to be done in this world. You can't live in this world without a body. Don't let me oversimplify it, but you couldn't possibly have gotten here this morning without your body....you can't possibly get out of here without your

body. There are certain things that you have to do in the course of this day that you just won't get done as a disembodied spirit. And when God made us as part of His created world, this physical universe, He saw fit to give us a body because a body is what we need in order to get everything done that needs to be done in this world.

Now let's take that most simple of all understandings -- that's what a body is. Now, Jesus Christ is not dead. We worship a resurrected Christ, and Jesus Christ is alive in this world. Oh, not physically present in the same sense that He was between the ages of one and thirty-three, back there in Palestine, but if our Christian faith means anything at all, we worship a resurrected Christ and He is alive and at work in this world.

Now, if He is to be alive and at work in this world, then He needs a body. And the New Testament understanding of Jesus Christ being alive and at work in the world today is its understanding of the Church. Bishop Nygren is absolutely right, isn't he, when he says to us that the Church is as the resurrected presence of Jesus Christ in the world today. Now you shouldn't find this difficult to understand, should you? When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, do you think this was the end of God's plan for His life? So very naturally our Blessed Lord, as He completes His earthly pilgrimage, turns to a group of people and says -- "Now you go - teach - preach - heal - baptize - " ...as much as to say, "Everything that I've been doing, you now do." The very simple way of thinking of the Church today is to say it is the projection of Jesus Christ into the world -- today.

Wasn't it Bishop Aulen in that great book of his on the Church who says that "Where the Church is, there is Jesus Christ; where Jesus Christ is,

there is the Church"? Now, no matter how difficult you may want this expression to become, begin with this very simple understanding: a body is something that you and I need if we're to get the work done that needs to be done in this world, as long as we're part of it. So that therefore Jesus Christ, if His work is to be done in this world, needs a body. Now take the figure of speech - - if His word is to be proclaimed, then He needs a body through which that word can be proclaimed. And that's exactly what Jesus Christ has given to the Church. He's given to the Church the Gospel, and the Church is the proclaimer of the Gospel. And where the Gospel is rightly preached, there is the Church.

We are His Body. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He was helping people. One of the grandest things that anybody could ever think about Jesus Christ was expressed in this manner: He was someone who went about doing good. This is an understanding of the Christian Church -- the doer of the great good of the world...Its teaching ministry, its healing ministry, its ministry of compassion. Wherever wounds are being healed, there is the Church in one way or another. Wherever the Truth is being made known, there is the Church in one way or another. Wherever the force of reconciliation is at work, there is the Church in one way or another. So the Apostle Paul says, "You are the body of Christ. You are meant to do these things. Keep in mind what you were meant to become."

But the amazing thing is that whenever any one of us gives himself to Jesus Christ, he brings all that he is, and that includes his limitations. They were a people, in the day of Corinth, who were divided, and they brought even their limitation to Jesus Christ, so that the Apostle Paul could even

say to a divided community, "But you are the body of Christ." Who is the great one who said, "Jesus Christ" (speaking of His Church, now, speaking of you and me) -- "Jesus Christ rides a lame horse and carves out of rotten wood." The amazing thing is that with all of our limitation, yet Jesus Christ is at work. And as the Apostle Paul was challenging these Christians at Corinth to become fully what they ought to be, so therefore you and I are constantly being challenged to become all that the Church ought to be.

I rise at this moment to sing the praise of the Church. It's derided on every count. There's a wave of negativism throughout the world, you've heard this said a hundred times -- and in the words of the President of the Lutheran Church in America, he doesn't know of any agency or institution or group of people on the face of the earth that could survive the kind of criticism that's been raised against the Church -- by friend and by foe alike! The salutary thing to remember is the challenging word of the Apostle Paul: "But you are the body of Christ -- remember who you are -- " ...and that God's activity in Christ is being done in and through the Church today.

Oh, I know that there are those who will tell you that you can't be sure where the Church is -- I know that there are those who will tell you that there is such a thing as the hidden church. But there's one simple rule that remains: by their fruits and by their noble intentions you shall know them, and with all of our limitations, the Church of Jesus Christ more than any other group of people on the face of the earth that's trying, even though she stumbles, to be faithful to her Master. So I rise to sing her praise.

A college student gave me, day before yesterday, a magazine to read. Knowing him as I do, and loving him as I do, I know exactly why he gave it

to me to read. He thinks I ought to become schooled in the other point of view. So out of appreciation, if not of respect, I read his magazine from cover to cover. Then I had to tell him of my reaction.....very, very cleverly done, this magazine, the acumen of all that's intellectually supreme. But then I said to him, I find in it very subtle overtones, of deriding and declaiming. I don't find it anywhere raising its voice in support of anything. In a very subtle way it's against everything. The grand and good things to be said about the Christian Church -- that while she's against evil in the world, she is always proclaiming the presence of God in Jesus Christ, who is in and through His Church. This is a grand and good thing to be said -- even about us!

In our somber moments we take ourselves to task, we who are part of the Body of Christ known as Saint Luke Congregation....we know our weaknesses, we know our limitations. Any man anywhere can take anything apart. But to keep reminding yourself, that despite your limitation God still says, "I need you, I want to work through you."

Now when you take this figure, the Body of Christ -- a body has different parts to it.....hands, feet, lips, lungs, heart -- there's diversity in a body. One ought not to be afraid of this. Yet there are those who say the Christian Church is failing Jesus Christ because of her diversity, there are some people who shy away from Roman Catholics just because they are different.....there are some people who shy away from Quakers, just because their way is different.....there are some people who shy away from other people because they're different -- they think differently, they dress differently, they behave differently. Yet basically we all belong to the human race, basi-

cally we're all the objects of God's love. And it's still possible that we might be able to learn from one another. The hand is different from the eye, and the eye is different from the foot, but each is necessary if the body is to perform its fullest function.

Take that figure of speech, the Body of Christ - - so when we come and we find ourselves as part of the Body of Christ, each of us is necessary if the full function is to be performed. And in the body you need a head. You physicians who are present in the congregation right now know exactly what happens when the head is no longer in control, when nerve centers begin to deteriorate. If the body is to function uniformly, there must be the control by a central agency. The Body of Christ has a head, and that head is Jesus Christ, and this makes for unity. And when Jesus Christ is in control, then the body does everything that Jesus Christ intends it to do.

Now this weakness in Corinth was that those people were putting in the place of Jesus Christ other men. And this can always be the weakness of the Church, this can be the weakness of an individual parishioner, when he can gather up his skirts and separate himself from the Body of Christ, because he may put up his own scheme and design and plan for congregational behaviorand if it doesn't suit his plan. But the true Church of Jesus Christ is where, despite our limitations, we allow ourselves to be ruled by the mind of Jesus Christ.

Going back again to that quotation that I gave you from the Swedish theologian, "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Church; where the Church is, there is Jesus Christ" - - whatever we think the term means, the Body of Christ, it

will be far less than what our Blessed Lord intended it to mean unless we therefore consider the whole community of Christians as the Body of Christ. One gives serious pause, then, as he reflects on such a term as "separated brethren" has any proper place in the Christian vocabulary.

I want to close by quoting for you a conversation. It comes from Dr. McAfee Brown's latest book, THE ECUMENICAL REVOLUTION. He sets down an actual conversation between a waiter and a priest in a small Roman pensione where most of the Protestant and Orthodox observers who had been attending Vatican Council II were living. The priest also lived among them, these non-Roman Christians, because he was serving as their translator.....

" Father, those observers are very good men,
aren't they?

Yes.

They all believe in God?

Yes.

There is only one God?

Yes.

So they believe in the same God we believe in?

Yes.

They all believe in Christ?

Yes.

There is only one Christ?

Yes.

So they believe in the same Christ as we
believe in?

Yes.

They have all been baptized?

Yes.

There is only one baptism?

Yes.

Then, Father, I do not understand. Why
are we divided? "

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"The Four Words of Advent: FORGIVENESS"

It's absolutely amazing what the sight and the sound of just one word can do to people. As an example, let me mention the name of someone that you particularly dislike, and the mood of our conversation can be altered from that moment on. Let me mention the name of some place where you've been and had a perfectly delightful experience, and a light will come upon your face, the conversation takes on a cordial tone. It's amazing what the sight or the sound of one word can do to a person. It can trigger any number of thoughts in a hundred-and-one different directions. It can release a variety of moods, it can shape the tenor of what may follow hour after hour.

Therefore you can fully appreciate what the visitor to a cemetery not far from New York City must have experienced, because it's always an interesting thing to read what appears on tombstones. Some people make it a habit of visiting graveyards just for that reason, to discover the unusual and the creative, how a man, in dying perhaps, wanted to be remembered by all who would even come his way and mark the path that leads to his grave.

Well if you were the visitor to that graveyard in the place not far from New York City, you'd be caught up short, because there the unusual does appear. Ordinarily there's a man's name.....there is no name on this tombstone. Ordinarily there's the date of birth.....there's no date of the birth on this tombstone. Generally speaking, there's the time of death

....there's no death date on this tombstone. The tombstone is completely unembellished by the sculptor's art, and only one word appears: FORGIVEN.

Immediately all kinds of thoughts can be triggered....

....what was the nature of his crime?

....what was the peculiar quality of his sin?

....whom did he defraud?....defame?...defile?

man or woman? ...young or old? ...business partner

or acquaintance? ...stranger or friend?

....neighbor or foe?

....all kinds of questions may come to your mind, by the very sight and sound of one word: FORGIVEN -- as you try to figure out the details.

But the details, let me save you time, are not important. The essential fact has already been proclaimed. For in life or in death, the thing that matters most is that a man should know that he's forgiven. In our relationship with God, this is primary -- nothing more important than this, that you and I should know that we're forgiven.

Do I have to remind you again....that's why we talk about it the first thing every time we come here to this place of worship. Maybe you noted the particular accent on that word, 'to grant us forgiveness' -- that's the way it was said this morning, and deliberately. For this is the key-note of all that happens when we first gather together in God's House. This is the thing that God wants most to give, this is the thing that we need most. Now on this, the first Sunday in Advent, this is why I tell you this is what Advent is all about. For if Advent teaches us anything, it teaches us that forgiveness is God's idea. That's what His coming is about. This is what God wants most to give, for this is what we need most.

Advent deals, if you please, with God's latest and last strategy. It's perfectly proper to read the Bible and to note on this page or on that page the different kind of strategy that God uses in His relationship with people. Don't be embarrassed by that thought, for God is the great strategist, and every now and then He deals with us in this manner, and later on He may choose to deal with us in another manner. It could be that this is what occurred to Jeremiah, that great Old Testament prophet, whose Old Testament lesson holds us in good stead on this First Sunday in Advent. He was perfectly aware what had happened in the reform in Josiah's day, how the Law was being re-discovered. But Jeremiah knew full well that this was not enough. God still had something else in mind for His people. You may meet Him on occasion as the great law-giver, and you may meet Him on occasion as one who exacts from us the fulfillment of the Law. But no man can ever fulfill the Law perfectly and completely.

And even as a man tries to be good, he can never quite be good enough entirely on his own. So God says there must be a different kind of strategy. For when men are good, it's never enough that they should be good -- it's that they should be good for the right reason, and it's that they should be good from proper motivation. So God, with all of His years of dealing with the children of men, Jeremiah says, now is going to come with a new strategy. And for our purpose this morning, on this First Sunday in Advent, we call it the strategy of forgiveness.

It's written largely in that part of the Old Testament lesson for today which now serves as the text for this sermon:

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

forgiven....this is the word that you and I want to hear most from God.

For in the final analysis, every man dies a sinner. Somewhere along the line he may have encountered Jesus Christ and he may know himself as numbered in the ranks of the redeemed, but you and I remain sinners until the very day that we die -- baptized, the recipients of God's grace, we always run the risk of falling from grace. We may be those who are being saved, but we are the sinning saved, and the thing that we need most to hear from God is the word "forgiven".

God knew this long before we did, and that's why forgiveness is God's idea. You and I would never have figured it out, you and I would never have known the real need for it. And it's even God who has to bring us to the place where we know that it's forgiveness that we need. He has to work out His own strategy to get us to turn to Him and to accept what He so graciously offers.

When you and I recognize the differences that we have in inter-personal relationships, how we set ourselves up so rigidly and project images against other people, and how, if we do not do it in deed, we harm them with our words and if not with our words with our thoughts.....the seemingly irreparable damage that is done in this way. Suppose God went off in His own divine corner, and He nursed all the wounds that we inflict against Him --

wherein could there be any hope for us? There are those who tell us that sin is not so much the breaking of a law as it is the breaking of God's heart -- offending -- disappointing a relationship. God knows all of this. And God, out of great love then, said, "I will go to them; I will be their God -- I will offer what they need, even before they ask." This is what we call the precious Gospel of God -- God taking the initiative, God breaking into our world -- God saying, "I offer you forgiveness."

What you and I seldom recognize is that forgiveness is a one-way street quite often, in this sense, that it moves in one direction. It moves from God to us.....it goes from the God-inspired to another man. Forgiveness always is initiated by God, and those whom God possesses. You and I would never know forgiveness if God had to wait for us to come to Him. This is the meaning of the word Gospel -- the Good News that God is always coming to us, God is always offering us something.....God is always saying, "I forgive you.....I forgive you.....I forgive you."

The man who is old enough to be his father waited with almost baited breath as the ministerial student went to the sacred desk to preach his first sermon. He had never heard the ministerial student preach before....

....what would be the clarion note?what would be
the heart of his message?

How thrilled the man-old-enough-to-be-his-father was when he heard the ministerial student begin by saying: "I suppose the three most important words in our language are 'I forgive you'"even more important, undoubtedly, than "I love you" because forgiveness is a higher type of love. God, in His dealings with us, God who is love comes to us and says, "I forgive

you."

Bishop Anders Nygren of the Church of Sweden has an excellent little book entitled, "The Gospel of God." Out of his own experience he could tell us so well that when the word had come that the occupying authorities no longer had their clutch upon Norway and Denmark, that the word went out, Norway is free! -- Denmark is free! But he said there were those who had gone into hiding, and when the word came to them in hiding they refused to believe it, they refused to accept it. Even though the marvelous victory had come, it was not really theirs until they accepted it.

God is giving us His grace, God is giving us His favor. Transformation sets in our lives when we accept it. As we are forgiven, so we go our way forgiving. In the New Testament there is an excellent example, the story of Zacchaeus. You might as well have the facts in the case, he was a scoundrel, and you would have disliked him intensely, had you known him. He took advantage of other people, that was his business. No wonder they hated him. That crowd in Jericho pushed him out of the way, not just because he was small of stature -- they despised him.

Then one day Jesus Christ saw him.....

Jesus Christ did not say, "I will first wait until Zacchaeus comes to me"

Jesus Christ did not say, "I will first wait until he puts his house in order, and then I'll say, Zacchaeus, this is a good thing that you have done....now that you've given some indication of improvement, you can have my heart and my hand....."

Ah, no.

But the Gospel that shines through on that page of the Scriptures is Jesus Christ taking the initiative, and Jesus Christ saying to Zacchaeus, "I Want to go to your house.....Zacchaeus, let's have a meal together"

....and as they talked it was made plain to Zacchaeus that he was being accepted...it was made plain to Zacchaeus that he was being offered something by Jesus Christ. And then the transformation set in, when he saw what Jesus Christ was giving to him. Then Zacchaeus was able to say, "The half of my goods I give to the poor." But think you for a minute that this might ever have occurred if Jesus Christ had come with a finger of condemnation? But the transformation set in only as Zacchaeus discovered that God was giving him something in Christ even before he asked for it, Zacchaeus then, knowing himself forgiven, began to forgive others.

I suppose, if you'll let me use the word quickly, almost as irascible a president as we've ever had, and I say the word with tongue in cheek, was Andrew Jackson -- surely an exceedingly colorful personality. Before he died he wanted to make his peace with God. So he called for the minister. And the minister counselled with him and dealt with him, and he made very bold to say to him (and a President does well to see himself a sinner as any man a sinner)...."Mr. President, do you forgive your enemies?" Andrew Jackson is supposed to have said, "Forgive my enemies? I forgive the people who have said unkind things about me when I was in office....I forgive the people who didn't like me.....but to forgive the people who question my strategy in war - - Iimplying that they made all kinds of misery for him in his conduct of his endeavors....."- - forgive those who spoke unkindly against my wife! -- I'm not so sure." The minister remained silent.

Then he said to the President, "But you want God to forgive you, don't you?" Forgiveness belongs to those who are willing to forgive anyone, because the God who forgives you is the God who forgives everybody.

Again let me remind you what Bishop Nygren says magnificently: "We are all in the hands of God -- either with our faith, or with our unbelief." God loves every one of us. God is willing to forgive every one of us. That's why He came to us in Jesus Christ.

In this world of inter-personal relationships, if reconciliation is ever to set in, then someone has to move. And by the grace of God, it's the Christian who is empowered to take the initiative. It's quite different, you see, than our ordinary procedure. We usually say, "When he proves himself repentant, and when he changes the error of his ways, then I will forgive." But we happen to have a God who forgives us -- in order that we might change the error of our ways. If that were not so, there wouldn't be any hope for us. This is what Advent is all about. One of the key words of Advent -- the words upon the lips of God himself -- forgive.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - December 3, 1967

O GOD, we could see ourselves as the company of the wounded, baffled and the bewildered, because no man can live the days of his years without being hurt.

But we have not come into Thy presence this day to talk about our wounds, whatever they may be. But by the searching light of Thy truth enable us to see the hurt that we have caused others. We can be so blind, we can be so reckless, we can be so thoughtless. And if it should become increasingly plain to us that we have offended, then empower us by Thy grace to make known to others our desire to be the channel of Thy forgiveness, even as we would expect them to forgive us.

O GOD, we trudge wearily the path of our years, then one day we know we will stand before Thee in the time of Judgment. Even now we are sustained by the precious thought that your Gospel has already come to us, that your Word and Sacrament, the blessed assurance of the forgiveness of God, is made effective. Let us walk thereby in that strength. Let each of us apply this truth, one to another, within the closest confines of his interpersonal relationships, even as Thy servant of old would say, "Redeem Thy world, O God, and begin with me."

THESE are the prayers that we offer, confident that you will hear and answer with your benediction. But now, with Thy Church throughout all the world, may it be the force of reconciliation in a world that's blackened by sin, that ~~xxx~~ unto Thee shall be all honor and glory in a world that has no ending.

OUR FATHER.....

"FOUR WORDS OF ADVENT: FEAR"

This sermon today begins with an illustration. But before I tell you the story, let me warn you in advance, I don't think you're going to believe it.

Presumably it's the recital of fact. The great Christian, General Gordon, at the Siege of Khartoum, is supposed to have said to those under him when they suggested that he put sandbags in the windows of his fortification, that any evidence of the fort being occupied could be blackened out from the enemy....infuriated he said, "There will be no sandbags put in these windows. But to the contrary, let them be opened wide! And I also issue the order that lighted candles shall be put on the tables and in the windows in clear view of the enemy, and let the enemy be told that the man who is in charge here is a man without fear. For when God created the world, and He was proportioning fear among the inhabitants, when He came to me, He ran out. And so when He created Gordon, He created a man without fear. Let this be declared to the enemy."

You find it difficult to believe, don't you? I shan't blame you one bit.

First off, who among us doesn't know what it is to be afraid? And have we ever really met any man who is without fear? The one descriptive that seems apt for practically all of us is that we are a people who have their moments of fear. Oh, I remember there are those who tell us, psychologists tell us, don't they, that every child that's born into the world is born with at least two fears (at least they used to tell us that) - - that a child at the very begin-

ning is afraid of a loud noise, that a child at the very beginning is afraid of being dropped, of falling.

But if a man doesn't begin with fear, at least it's not long until he cultivates fear, fear of a thousand-and-one different varieties. And if he doesn't develop fear on his own, then somewhere along the line there are those who teach us to be afraid, because they tell us it's absolutely necessary....

...where is the set of parents who at an early age do not teach their children to stay away from the hot oven, to stay away from the knobs that turn on the gas to the range....who teach children to be afraid of playing with matches....who teach children to fear the flow of traffic, on any street....who teach children even to be afraid of people, to be afraid of strangers.....

What, now, will you do with this bewildering and confusing thing? There are those who tell us not to be afraid. There are those who tell us that we grow and develop and become strong according to the things that we fear.

Even Scripture on this score can be a bit confusing and bewildering. When God's messenger announced the birth of His Son, did not the angels begin by saying, "Fear not - - behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people".....and when there were those that came to the Resurrection Garden, did not God's appointed messenger, the angel, say, "Don't be afraid." And what is for some of us the most treasured page by way of comfort and consolation in the New Testament, that vocation from the 14th chapter of John, in which John would have us remember the words of

our Blessed Lord - - "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

What, now, will you make of it? Because there are other passages in Scripture in which God makes perfectly plain to us that we are in duty bound to become afraid. How it may have been with you I don't know, but for me, one of the first verses of Scripture that I was ever taught to memorize: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Now we come, even in this Advent season, and with part of the Lectionary assigned for this, the Second Sunday in Advent, we who anticipate the Lord's appearing are being admonished by his chosen mouthpiece:

"But unto you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings - -"

...God's promised blessing belongs to those who fear His name. What, now, will you make of it?

Well, in truth you can quickly say, and very properly so, that fear can be a salutary thing. It's something, I tell you, that we've sadly neglected in our day, this salutary emphasis upon the fear of the Lord. Still as of old there are blessings that come by His hand which are reserved only for those who stand in awe of Him. Small wonder, then, that Martin Luther in the writing of his Catechism, makes perfectly plain to us as we deal with the Commandments: "We should so fear and love God" -- so fear and love -- fear-and-love -- those twin words that must never be separated. For in the mind of God fear remains a salutary thing, and that there are blessings that He has in store to be given only to those who stand in awe of Him, who know what it is to fear Him.

Maybe our problem isn't so much that we're afraid as it is that we don't

know how to handle our fears. Maybe, on the other score, the problem may not be so much that we don't know that we ought to be afraid. I do not pose as one who fully understands the mind of the younger generation -- my word for it, my friend, I'm doing my best to try to understand. And that not simply on the basis of trying to recall how I felt when I was fifteen...seventeen...eighteen....twenty. It's never enough to try to superimpose upon today's generation your mind-set when you were that age. For a lot has happened in the meantime. So one must almost begin de novo -- begin all over again, begin fresh, in trying to understand what they think and what they feel.

The one word that I have for them is that they are unsettled. And I think I know why they're unsettled: they're running scared. But I'm not so sure that they know it. Fear itself can be crippling, but it's never quite as crippling when it's unrecognized fear that unsettles us. As an example, this is the first generation of young people ever to have lived that has hanging over them the threat of total annihilation....this is the first generation of young people to deal with the fact of an atom bomb.

I can recall when as a youngster I took life so seriously that I was afraid that the world would come to an end before I could grow up, and then there was no threat of an atom bomb. But this generation has to deal with the fact that man has created an instrument, and I use the term advisedly, of total destruction.

Now God be praised and God be thanked, it's the nature of youth to want to make a contribution, to want to do something. It's the nature of youth to want to find life meaningful. And if I read them aright, and if I put my finger upon the spiritual pulsebeat of their souls, they're running scared, and they're

afraid. No wonder they do such unpredictable things. No wonder, in certain quarters, their behavior can be so reckless. For when a man is afraid, he never behaves normally.

They are also the generation who, perhaps more than any other generation in recent years, that has to deal with the fact that there are people who say God is dead. It's been bandied around so much, from almost any quarter....and yet did we not (and I speak as a father who helped to rear and to train at least two who are a part of this younger generation) -- did we not teach them in the days of their childhood that God is, that God loves them, and that life has no meaning apart from one's relationship with God? Then as they begin to mature, to have to deal with this **threatening** statement, to be encountered by words that they may not fully understand -- I'm not so sure that any man who uses the term that God is dead knows exactly what he means by it....for those who are not old enough to even to begin to appreciate the meaning of the words, it remains a threat, and a terrible possibility. How can life have meaning if you take God out of it?

It's this generation of young people that has to deal with the fact that there are people who speak so negatively against the Church, that it's not to be trusted, that it's not relating to life. They may not be able to know how to handle such a statement. When you begin to talk like this you begin to take away something, that whether they realize it or not, they can ill afford to get along without.

Theirs is the generation that has also been told that we've come into the end of the Christian Era. When Paul Tillich wrote this book that bears the title: The End of The Protestant Era, he had a strong inclination to urge his publishers

to label it The End of The Christian Era....but I am told there are those who said this would be too frightening.

So what does one do, then, when he comes to have to deal with this kind of thing?

Well, we're not the first people in the course of history to have to wrestle with such things. Erasmus, in one of his colloquies, reminds us that even in his day the world had gone to rot -- nothing seemed sacred any more, and life was without meaning and purpose. But God has His own way of implanting Himself in the minds of those to whom He whispers in the ear, and then they're let loose in the world -- they begin to shout and they begin to speak and they begin to write. And they encourage faith that's built on the ground-work of fear itself.

It is an awesome thing to fear the fact of God. It is an awesome thing to go on fearing the fact of God. If I had my ministry to begin all over again, I know one thing that I can declare to you now with conviction -- I would strike as I have never struck before the fact that God is continually to be held in fear. And what is it to fear God? It's to treat Him with reverence and respect and always to stand in awe of Him. According to the understanding that we should have of Malachi's statement:

" - - for those of you who fear my name . . "

...it's specifically to practice religion, with reverence, and to go about one's business day by day allowing the fact of God to have full sway in your life despite the fact that there are many things you can't possibly understand.

The curse of our generation, as a retiring Executive Secretary of the World Council of Churches has put it: "Ours is a generation for whom Heaven has no invi-

tation, and Hell has no terror." This is what you get when you allow people to so fraternize with God that you can move Him out of your existence....this is the result when people become "buddy-buddy" with God. The older I become, the more I am convinced that even in the relationship of people, there ought to be a kind of respectful distance in which you stand in awe of the tremendous truth of personality itself.

The prophet was talking about terrible things yet to come. The prophet was writing as though he had written yesterday, but there's going to be such a thing as a scorched-earth policy, and he was even bold enough to say that God's hand would be in it. But then by way of comfort and courage he says, "But to any man who fears God's name, there will be escape."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FOUR WORDS OF ADVENT: COMFORT"

When Jesus came, He came preaching. He did not stay in the carpenter's shop forever. For in God's plan for His life, there was the time when He left Nazareth and became the itinerant one, and wherever He went He declared to people the Good News of the Kingdom.

In God's plan for us, sermons are meant to be listened to. But not all sermons are heard. The fault may not lie in the sermon itself; I'm not so sure, if I were you, that I'd be too quick to blame the preacher. Some sermons are never heard just because some people make up their minds they're not going to listen to that sermon....for it's that sermon, you see, that's applicable to everybody else except the listener. So deep-seated is human sin.

Or on the other hand, there are some sermons that are never heard because we lack the experience by which to appreciate that part of the Gospel that's being proclaimed in a particular sermon. Truth is many-sided, that is, it has many segments, and it's well-nigh difficult to proclaim the full truth in any single sermon. We deal only with certain aspects of it, certain segments of it.

Now God himself may be the only one who knows just how this sermon, about to be preached, is going to be received. But I think I can tell you one thing: it may have meaning for a certain group of people who above all others have known despair, who have had those low moments in their life when they believe that God has forgotten how to be gracious.....and who when they have cried out to God, have cried out for only one thing: "Have mercy, Lord! Have mercy!"

....and showing themselves truly contrite, God reveals Himself to them with nothing save comfort - - a God who does assure us that He knows how to be gracious, a God who will assure us that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

I'm not forgetting that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth there were times when He stood up to preach that there was fire in His eyes, and He spoke in somber tones that made people fairly tremble, shudder at the prospect of being numbered among the damned. I'm also fully aware that when He came preaching there were times when He spoke about the outstretched arms of God in longing, as the waiting Father, to receive and to bless, and in His blessing to empower and to give strength and to impart courage and consolation. If you, my friend, have ever known what it is to see yourself as a wicked creature, a disobedient servant, one who deserves nothing but the wrath of God, and then being truly contrite for your sins you have turned to Him and asked to hear Him say only one word: forgive - - "I forgive you"then it's this sermon that's being beamed your way, it's this sermon that's going to speak to the condition of your soul.

Suppose you look at it this way: there is an economy in God's doings. Take His comfort as an example. It's reserved, as the Old Testament writer said, for God's people. Precious as His comfort is, it would lose its integrity if it were wasted on the avowedly willful and disobedient. The historical setting for the text of this sermon, which by the way is the Old Testament lesson for the Day, goes back some five hundred years before Jesus Christ. Israel had come upon hard and difficult times. Only a handful remained. They were the precious remnant....and in their Babylonian captivity they knew themselves as God's dis-

obedient children. All around them on every side was apparent prosperity, but it wasn't theirs. And in their somber moments they reflected upon the fact that they were where they were just because they had brought down upon them the punishment of God.

But the devout remnant kept hoping for the time that maybe God Himself would intervene, and when He would intervene, He would show Himself as one who would comfort them and empower them anew with strength and courage to persevere with patience the course which was theirs yet to run. It was a sad and miserable state in which they found themselves. And for many of them, until they could whisper the name GOD, it just didn't make sense. Nothing, no-how, seemed to be able to be put together right.

It could be characteristic of our day. Cartoonists sometimes preach effectively. There is the cartoon showing a man and woman standing at a counter in the toy department of a certain store. They've come to buy a toy for their child. The clerk shows them a strange assortment of odd fragments in a box, and quite boastfully and surely with a degree of sophistication, says, "It's the boy for today's child who lives in this complex world of ours. For when you try to put it together, it just never comes out right."

That's a commentary on today's world. There are the earnest-minded ones who try to put it together, but it just never seems to come out right. Unless, perchance, one believes in a God who will present Himself and reveal Himself, and when He does, gives the empowering strength by which we can go on.

And that, by the way, is what comfort is. It's not that silly soft thing that you and I sometimes make of it -- almost a meaningless sentimental gesture, that's like a soothing syrup -- that isn't comfort! It has all the masculinity

that becomes God, it's a strong and a sturdy thing. It means "to make us strong" -- that's the root meaning of the word -- to fortify -- to receive grace from God by which we are empowered....to be assured that by God's grace meaning can come to us in the mess in which we find ourselves. So God's chosen vessel, His spokesman Isaiah by name, stood up and he said, when it seemed like such a ridiculous thing to say....

"God will speak comfortably to us....
Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
thus says your God . . . "

...ends up that precious passage by saying that the word of God remains forever.

Now let me say again, if you've found yourself the miserable one, stained and sullied by your sin, wondering if there can be any meaning come out of this thing any more at all, then take heart, my friend, for the God who comes to us in Christ comes to speak comfort, to give you courage, and to enable you to stand strongly and firmly.

There was an old man who was ending his preaching ministry. Somebody said to him, "Tell us, if you had to begin your ministry all over again, what notes would you strike that heretofore you have not struck? or with what accent would you preach the Gospel in a way that might be different than what you've already done?" And the man who had lived the years fully and well simply replied: "If I had my years to live over again, I would strike the note of comfort in a way that I've never struck it before. For if the years have taught me anything, the years have taught me that men need to be empowered by God, they need to be put on their feet, they need to be given courage to persevere."

Life has a way of bringing all of us to our knees, if we're only sensible enough to know it! On occasion there are those who come to me quite concerned about their young. You see, youth can be so bold, youth can be so cocksure. Some young people even get to the place where they think they can live without God! And then I say to myself, they might do a great deal of damage in the meantime, but life itself has a way of taking care of these things. If there's one thing that I know about life, it's this: life itself has a way of bringing a man to his knees, and there's no better position in which to pray. And when that happens, a man might cry out, "Have mercy! Have mercy!" And then God who is a God of love, whose will for men is that they should be saved, whose will for men is that they might serve a useful purpose, will not allow them to be consigned to Hell forever, but will step into the breach and empower them by His comforting grace.

Some of you know full well how this one person at least thrills at this magnificent liturgy which becomes our Church. Even as I sat during the liturgy this morning, I felt, as it were, every pulsating breath. And there's a great moment in the liturgy of our Church when the Declaration of Grace is given. Do you remember how it goes? -- "The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life, and the grace and comfort of His Holy Spirit."

It wasn't a mistake, of course it wasn't a mistake that when Jesus was here on earth and was fully aware that the time would come when He would end His earthly pilgrimage, He kept assuring and re-assuring that precious remnant of followers that God would not leave Himself without witness, and

He kept talking about the one who was yet to come, and He called him the Comforter -- God Himself who would empower us with strength. God will never detach Himself from us, no matter how willful or disobedient we may be, He's still a God who wants to be found within reach, and never more so than He is for the person who is truly contrite and cries out for mercy. He is the one for whom God declares His precious word....

"Comfort, comfort ye my people."

Beloved, none of us fully knows how many people there are in life who are battered and bruised by all the frustrations that have come to them. Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the great preachers of another day, used to tell the students in Homiletics at Union Seminary, "Whenever you stand up to preach, remember that as you look over the congregation, every face represents a problem." Every man has his burdens. If only you and I, as we go through life, by the grace and comfort of God's Holy Spirit would endeavor to help other people to be made strong, as they journey along the way.

My friend, may I ask you this question: how many people could you name that by the comfort and grace of God's Holy Spirit you have been able to stand on their feet? -- and put their faces toward the sun? -- give them the gracious nudge to go on? This is what you and I are always asking God to do for us. He who comes, comes with healing. He who comes, comes as the answer to God's declaration that His people should be empowered, made strong, given nerve and fiber to their muscle, to persevere.

I'm wondering if you will be patient with me as I read for you shortly a very homespun-type poem. It may not be much for poetry, but it could

Speak to the condition of your soul and assure you again of the kind of God we have in Christ, who because He wants to make us strong, will never allow Himself to be detached from us. And when He comes, it is because He wants to comfort us, make us strong. Coventry Patmore, in his poem entitled "The Toys" out of his own life and experience shares with us a very precious moment. His wife whom he had loved and adored died. She was the patient one who knew how to deal with children, firmly, patiently. One night he lost his patience, he rebuked his child, dismissed the child and sent him off to bed unkind. Then in moments of reflection he felt constrained to go into the child's bedroom. He could not allow himself to be detached forever, even from a child who deserved to be punished....

THE TOYS

Coventry Patmore

My little son, who looked from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobeyed,
I struck him, and dismissed
With hard words and unkind,
- His mother, who was patient, being dead,
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed.
But found him slumbering deep,
With darkened eye lids and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with
careful art
To comfort his sad heart.

So when that night I prayed
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FOUR WORDS OF ADVENT: BEHOLD"

It was one of those seemingly rare moments when God gave shouting orders, so it is recorded for us in the 40th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, when God says to the prophet:

"Stand up and declare to the people, lift
up your voice with strength, 'Behold your
God!' Behold, the Lord God will come with
a strong hand - -"

....something of a jolt to our systems, because usually we don't think of God as one who comes shouting.

Generally speaking, we think of Him as one who comes quietly, who speaks softly, who whispers in our ears. But God does have His moments when He has to shout, not, undoubtedly because He takes pleasure in shouting, but because that might be the only way that He gets our attention.

A contemporary cartoonist in a recent publication has an interesting interpretation of the shape of things of our present world. The world is pictured as a globe, of course, people who are busy, hurrying about with feverish activity....and as they run about they hurt one another, they bruise one another, and the world is left bleeding, and a fractured world at that. Hovering above the world is a group of angels....and the artist has the lead angel saying to the rest of them: "I guess we'll have to shout louder. They don't seem to hear us down there."

Did it ever occur to you how much of God's energy, figuratively speaking, is spent in trying to get us to hear Him? It's a figure of speech that perhaps you don't care to use, of God who comes shouting. And yet, what do you

make of the role of the prophet? God's use of prophets was simply to get people to stand up in the presence of other people and to do nothing but say, "Thus saith the Lord -- hear what God has to say."

Any student of the Scriptures as he reads the Good Book discovers how ever so often God is doing nothing but trying to get people to turn around and pay attention to Him.....

....trying to get people to stand long enough that
they can focus their attention upon Him...

....trying to get people to be quiet long enough
that they might be able to hear what He has to say.....

Ever since God took that great and wonderful risk in giving us freedom of will we have been a very busy people, we have been a very eager people, we have been a very ambitious people, we have been a very clever people. In fact, we have been so clever, so eager, so ambitious, that we've reached the point where we think that we can run the world without giving any reference to God whatsoever.

And could it not be said that the besetting sin for most of us is the attempt on our part to wrest the control of the universe out of the hands of God? -- always our eager desire to do it our way. And as over against this you get (now deal with it very carefully) -- as over against this you get a God who has to shout, as over against this you get a God who has to try ever so earnestly to get us to pay attention to Him, because after all God did make the world, and the world remains as the evidence of His creative energy. And God knows how the world was best meant to operate. And so like

someone who is always saying, when everything else fails, why don't you turn to the book of instructions? -- when everything else fails, why don't you consult the manufacturer? -- for he who made it and he who designed it knows best how it was meant to run and to operate.....so as you read the Good Book you come face to face with one prophet after another who is doing nothing except this: "Behold God! Listen to what He has to say! Focus your attention upon Him."

When you characterize this world of ours you come up with only one thing, that generally speaking we are a people who have forgotten the fact of God. Remember what I told you repeatedly about the book that I read by Stephen Neal, a great and discerning spirit of our time, who visited America. And after he went back to his native shores he wrote a book. He was tremendously impressed with so much in our Western world. But he said we lack, what he refers to and uses as the title of his book: "The Eternal Dimension."

Now all of this has happened because man is a very clever person, and man is a very able person, and very ambitious. The net result of this is expressed in what is recognized in many quarters as a religion, but basically it's nothing but humanism. Humanism is the exaltation of man, man who is busy trying to improve his lot, man who is busy trying to make a better world out of this world, but he spends all of his time and his energy without ever referring to the fact of God!

Now what happens when man is so clever and so able?

He can fashion an atomic bomb....and he can bring himself to the place where if he wants to, either deliberately or on the other hand quite recklessly, apparently he can destroy himself. And after humanism has run its

course for several decades, for the spiritually sensitive you have nothing on your hands but a kind of hopeless fatalism. And it's expressed in different ways in different quarters and unusual manner.

As long ago as twenty-one years when John Sutherland Bonnell was the pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, he went to his pulpit on a Sunday morning in December and told his congregation about an experience that he had with a band of teenagers, teenagers tremendously interested in their world. One of them, eighteen years of age, said, "Dr. Bonnell, tell us honestly - - do you think that in the next twenty years there will be any world left at all?" For she and her kind had been overwhelmed by the fact that we had an atomic bomb. She was simply reflecting what somebody had said, that the atomic age is here to stay, but are we? For the first time, you see, we've raised up a generation of teenagers who are overwhelmed by the fact that ours is an age that could destroy itself. And as I've intimated in other sermons, some of us who are older have no idea whatsoever what this has done to them. No wonder it makes for strange patterns of behavior, when you live in a world that could be as frightening as all this. Of course one is frightened when he rules out the fact that God should have anything to do with this world.

But whenever preachers have gone to sacred desks this is what they've done, in their own way....as dignified as possible, they've shouted the word GOD -- just as much as to say that this world still belongs to God, and God exercises a kind of economy, God is not about to waste His efforts, God-who-made-this-world is not about to let man destroy it. Wicked as the world may be, it's still in the hand of God. And Anders Nygren is perfectly right when he said - - "We are all in the hand of God, whether with our belief or with

our unbelief." And you may recall what was said to quote a line from another sermon in this series that deals with the key words of Advent: that God is not about to take a detached attitude toward His world -- He will not leave us forever. We may have our moments in somber reflection when we believe that God has forgotten to be gracious, so wicked is man that he even blames God.....but God will not walk off, gather His skirts about Him and allow His world to go to Hell.

So we come now to this, the last in the key words of Advent: Behold.

Behold what? Behold whom?

Behold GOD.

What about this God? He's a God who identifies Himself with us, He is a God who is active in history, He is a God who reveals, He is a God who participates. He will not allow Himself to be removed, and to be detached.

You ought to read your Scripture carefully, my friend, thoughtfully and earnestly. When the prophet Isaiah stood up to call our attention to the fact of God.....

...and by the way, God is the Great Attention-getter....

...He's always calling attention to Himself, because

that's what our need is.....

.....and when Isaiah stood up as God's mouthpiece, he says,

"Behold, the Lord God will come with a strong hand,
and his arm shall rule for him -- "

...notice, then, what this God is going to do:

"He will feed his flock like a shepherd -- "

"He will gather the lambs in his arms - -

"He will carry them in his bosom - -

"He will gently lead those that are with young - - "

Ah, you call that a poetic expression, you call that romanticizing the fact of God. Call it what you will, but the fact remains that it's still this: that God who comes is going to identify and be active in this world, He's going to do something. And it's always in the realm of the restorative, it's always in the realm of reconciliation, it's always in the realm of healing, and patching up....it's always in the realm of grace, and of love. "Behold God" - - - He's still to be reckoned with. The world is His, and that's what He's always trying to tell us.

Now as ever against this humanism that characterizes the last few generations, we have to reckon with the net results. And what do we have? Would you accept this as a characterization of our day? - - -

"Our life is like a narrow raft,
Afloat upon a hungry sea,
Whereon is but a little space,
And each man eager for a place.
He doth thus thrust his brother in the sea,
And so the sea is salt with tears,
And our life is worn with fears."

Behind all the belief that exalts what some people even refer to as the "deity of man" is a desolating philosophy, when man allows himself to believe that he can remain on the throne and do whatever he pleases.

Let me share with you a quotation, perhaps one of the finest things to come from the mind and the spirit of what some of us recognize as the greatest contribution that the Lutheran Church has ever made to an American pulpit, Paul Scherer.....who confesses that for twenty-five years he fairly

ignored the prophet Isaiah. And then he discovered it, and he spent a great deal of his time doing nothing but reading, earnestly and prayerfully, sixteen chapters in the prophecy of Isaiah. He's written a magnificent book called "Event in Eternity." Somewhere in that treatment he talks about the kind of thing that I have been sharing with you now, a world that tries to run along day by day without any reference to the fact of God. When we do that, we have such a damning philosophy that possesses our mind and our spirit and we end up with this characterization....listen carefully:

"This world in which we live - - "

(he's quoting now)

"This world in which we live is not a milk-and-bun shop. It is a thieves' den in which the violent survive and the submissive succumb. In it two things predominate: you grab, or you are grabbed. Every kingdom and republic has been built out of loot, and every kingdom, republic and empire is ultimately lost to a looter. That you can knock me down, and I can knock you down, is a supreme fact in history. Grab or be grabbed, that's what war is all about. And whatever your politics or morals may be, I, anyhow, prefer to be a grabber rather than a grabbee. Grab, grabbing, grabbed - - in these three words is condensed 90% of world history, and in war the remaining 10% doesn't count."

The frightening thing is that these words were not spoken by an Adolph Hitler, they were not spoken by Benito Mussolini, they were not spoken by a Joseph Stalin. They were spoken by a man who had a seat in the United Nations....so insidiously has this philosophy of running a world without God crept into high places.

Now what is Advent all about except God trying to get our attention, except God shaking His finger at us and saying, "But you can't get on without

me forever".....except God saying to us: "Look at me!" It is significant that when God came into the world, in His supremest revelation, He came in the form of a baby. For the strangest thing about this wicked world is that even in our baser moments we somehow have a way of allowing a child to get our attention. So we sang in this hymn just before the sermon, that God-come-to-us in the Babe of Bethlehem - - "to human view displayed - - " It is a time when God comes shouting, because He wants us to hear what He has to say.

Sometimes I get a bit annoyed with people who say that the Church and those who are her preachers are no longer relevant. Maybe it's because despite all my limitations and my weaknesses, I still have an exalted opinion of what God intends the Church to do in His world, and what God has seen fit from time to time to do through someone who stands at a sacred desk. I do get a bit annoyed, therefore, with people who say that the Church and her spokesmen are no longer relevant.

This is why I fully appreciate what Dr. Scherer once said, when he read an article in the CHRISTIAN CENTURY about a man who said that he went to church and he found nothing that he could relate to the world. Dr. Scherer very carefully observed that if that man had gone to church and listened earnestly, and if the preacher had done nothing except mention the word God, he'd have enough to keep himself busy in the world outside. For this is what the fact of God means - - - relating our science, relating our politics, relating our culture to something over and above ourselves. No wonder ever so often the prophets are doing nothing but saying: "Behold -- GOD!"

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"Behold, a virgin will be with child and
shall bring forth a son, and his name
shall be called Emanuel, being inter-
preted, God with us - -"

It sounds like the answer to a dream, you know, or does it? Man has always longed for some better situation. He has run his course dreaming that some day, somehow, somewhere, things will be different. This is the nature of man. So his soul is somewhat at tiptoe when he receives this glorious proclamation, for the day had come when God would visit him. That's what we celebrate this night that marks the Holy Nativity -- God-come-to-us -- God stooping to our level -- God taking up His abiding-place in our midst.

That's what God had in mind on Christmas. We give lip service to it tonight. But in our more somber moments, and when we allow ourselves to be completely realistic, it's not exactly what we had in mind. For if we had our way, we'd much rather go to be with God! -- rather than for God come to us. Because if God comes to us, then we may have to accept the fact that we have to remain where we are, we have to go on living in our human situation.

But our dream has been, hasn't it, that we could be with God? -- in heaven, where there's no sorrow, where there's no disease, where there's no pain, where there is no sin. This is the kind of world we want. So in our somber moments, if somebody gave us our wish, we'd say, "This is what we want." As far as this present world is concerned, we would like to be rid

of it. For this present world is characterized by the threat of the atomic bomb. How can we go on being happy here? Who among us has not lived long enough to see what happens to people whose lives are stained by sin, whose bodies are crippled by disease. It would be far better off for us if we could be somewhere where these things don't happen, and that would be to be with God. For haven't we always been told that where God dwells, in His estate, there is no sorrow, there is no pain, just eternal bliss. So quite realistically speaking, Christmas is something of a disappointment, because it isn't a case of God coming down to us and taking us back up to Him, but it's the case of God coming down to us, and staying here. And it is a wicked world.

Stephen and Rosemary Benet once wrote a series of poems for Americans. One of them in the series deals in a very imaginative way with the mother of Abraham Lincoln. Nancy Hanks, as you know, died when Abraham Lincoln was but a child. In this imaginative way Nancy Hanks comes to every new entrant into the Kingdom of Heaven, and she says to each new arrival...

"Tell me, did you ever get to meet my child?

...do you know anything at all about him?

...what happened to him when he became a man -- what

did he do? -- where did he go?

This is the question which the world has a right to ask of the Christ Child. For ever so often when we come to celebrate Christmas we think of a Christ Child. We come adoringly. But the Christian ethic also asks us to remember, the Baby did grow up, and He did become a man. And now we must remind ourselves that when He grew up and became a man, He lived in a world

such as we have today, a world that's characterized by sin and by misery. God did not see fit to put a magic wand over His Son's head, and to shield and protect Him. And this is the message that we must learn and remember, the message of Christmas. It is not a case of us with God -- it's the case of God with us....and that means we remain where we are. Any man who follows Jesus Christ is never given the assurance that one day he'll come to the bend in the road that says "Detour Around Adversity."

Now, let's ask ourselves the question: God come to us? Who'd ever know it? When He did come, there weren't very many people who knew it. Why, even the one closest at hand didn't know He was there. Had you asked the innkeeper to show you the way to God-come-in-Christ, it would never have occurred to him to take you back and to that stable and say, "Why, here He is, of course."

God-come-to-us-in-Christ - - who'd ever know it? Well there were some who did know it -- only a handful of course...

....some shepherds knew it, because they were accustomed to living in solitude....they knew what it was to quiet the mind and to hush the heart, and to meditate upon the fact of eternal truth....they knew it.

....there was an old man and an old woman, Anna and Simeon, who went daily to the temple believing that one day this God who had promised to reveal Himself would come.....and when they saw the Christ Child, they knew that God had come in Him.....and that's why they could say so magnificently that the world has never

forgotten it:

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servants depart
in peace, according to thy word. For mine
eyes have seen thy salvation . . . "

....there were some wise men who knew it, because they
had been taught to believe that the fear of God
is the beginning of wisdom.

God-with-us.....who'd know it? Would you?

God-with-us -- who'd know where to look for Him? Most people wouldn't.
But had you been there, and felt constrained to help some poor traveler in
trouble, you'd have known where to look for Him. Had you been someone pos-
sessed by a love for children, you'd know where to have looked for Him. Had
you lived at that time, and you would have known what it was to respect a man
who looked upon his son, even though he was a teenager, ankle-deep in shavings
in a carpenter shop -- you'd have believed that God had come in Christ. But
remembering all of this, these ~~are~~ the characterizations of this present world.
It is in our common life that these things are found. In a world stained by
sin and misery, God is present.

It's not easy to believe, it's not easy to accept. I could never have
preached this sermon to you twenty years ago, for I was then the supreme opti-
mist of souls.....unrealistic, of course, still carrying around in the recess-
es of my mind something of the teenager, who more than thirty years ago stood
up on a high school platform and recited the preface to that Kellogg-Brian
Peace Pact, that was to rule out all prospective war after World War I.

But there is no peace in the world tonight. There's trouble. Trouble
everywhere. Back in 1862 the Union Army was engaged in one of the bloodiest

battles of the Civil War, over not so far away in Fredericksburg, Virginia. An enterprising reporter wanted to get the word back to the NEW YORK HERALD. There was only one wire service in Fredericksburg. He happened to get there first, made his report.

James Gordon Bennett, the Editor of the NEW YORK HERALD in New York City wired back: "Don't let anybody else get on the wire. I want this to be an exclusive for our paper." And the reporter simply replied, "But I've told you everything." And rather sharply the Editor in New York City wired back "But keep on sending in some kind of report -- send in anything, even send in the Book of Job if you want to." Somewhat chagrined and rebuked, that's exactly what the reporter did -- filled up the time, occupied the wire service by sending back pages from the Book of Job.

This is something of a moral. This is what the world is always sending back to us, the wire services from any corner of the globe - - - nothing but pain and tribulation and trouble. This is our world.

We'd like to get away from it, we'd like to go to be with God. But God comes to us. God plants Heaven in our breasts. God enables us to persevere with patience the course which is ours yet to run.

It would have been so much easier to come to this sacred desk tonight to talk about shepherds, and angels, and wise men, and to focus your attention upon a helpless babe in a manger. But I'm constrained to remind you that the Baby grew up, and He lived in the kind of world that's our kind of world. One day we'll begin to praise God for having done this. For the ultimate that God has in mind for us is that we might develop character, and if character is to be developed, it finds its fullest expression in the man who is redeemed. So

God comes to us in Christ -- to redeem us -- in and through our present situation.

There are some people who wring their hands and say: "Look what the world has come to!...."

The Christmas message is: "Look what has come to the world!"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

With song the air was filled
When angels brought the word.
My heart beat fast and thrilled:
Such songs I never heard!
They said in some strange language:
'Excelsis! Gloria!'
I raised my head and tried to hear,
But only "God" came clear.

They sang, and sang; but what,
I could not understand.
I answered "We know not
Your Latin in this land!
If you wish me to listen
Please-speak to me straight out
You'll find my simple plain Walloon
Will fit to any tune."

Then dazed I heard their news;
That Christ the Lord is born!
But that His life He'd lose,
Perhaps before the morn,
If no one brought Him comfort,
For He was cold and poor;
He had a stone beneath His head
And straw was all His bed.

I called the shepherds, quick!
We filled our bags with cake
And cheese and milk so thick,
As much as we could take.
And following the star's beam
We found the little crib.
The Virgin spoke Walloon and smiled
And let us hold the Child!

Belgian Christmas Carol

"NO OTHER GODS"

Some time between now and the end of January the Parsonage Family will be moving from that bit of Eden which we've enjoyed for the past twelve years at 9219 Manchester Road to the newly acquired property at 919 Highland Drive. In anticipation of that move, Winifred of course will be thinking about the items she will be wanting to take, and it's my responsibility to think in terms of what happens to the study in the transposition, what books will no longer remain on those shelves. For after twenty-seven years a man ought to think in terms of discarding certain volumes.

So as the move will be made I'll be scanning very carefully the titles of those books. It's amazing what titles have been chosen for those books, and equally amazing how varied the content.

There's one book I wish I had on the shelves. I'm certain that I wouldn't want to give it up. It's a book, by the way, that is yet to be written. It could be that there's an enterprising author in our midst who one day may choose to write a book for which I would now give the title -- "Great Moments in History."

To the best of my knowledge, it's never been written, and I think I know the reason why. Who is going to make the selection? Who will be the judge as to what in the final analysis will remain as recorded history the great moments? When you begin to select, you begin to exclude. And

if I knew such a person who would be ambitious to attempt such writing, I'd like to make certain nominations, that is for the great moments in history.....

...not to be overlooked in the great moments in history could be that time when a man named Christopher Columbus appears before a queen and asks, seeks to solicit her support for a brave new venture, and the accent would be a great moment because it deals with a brave new venture.....

...I'd also nominate that moment when a man named Alexander Graham Bell walks into a man's office, presumably a man who has much wealth, and Bell has underneath his arm a queer-looking contraption, and tries to get financial backing.... and in all likelihood Graham Bell would have said to his prospective backer - - "It's going to open up a whole new world of communication -- something the like of which we've never known before - - "

...and reading backward, of course, there would have to be that time when the Wright brothers would be seeking support - - they, too, could have spoken in this manner -- "It's a whole new world out there."

Well significantly enough, almost every nomination that I would make as a great moment in history might deal with the entrance into a whole new world looking to something yet to be discovered, something yet to be established.

But then with the utmost of somber reflection I would say to this enterprising author, "But whatever you do, be sure to include this moment...."

...and then I would suggest to him that he turn the pages of the Bible, and he'd come to the 6th chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah, where Jeremiah stands up and confronts the people of his nation and says something like this:

" -- ask for the old ways -- walk
in the old paths; therein you will
find peace restored to your souls -- "

I'd call it a great moment in history when a man stood up and was brave and bold enough to say, "I bring nothing new to your times. I ask only that you give good and proper heed to something that's old."

I'm perfectly aware of the fact that every generation has been characterized by an itch for the novel. We're always fascinated by something that's new. Look what's happened in our generation -- ours is the generation that's had the "New Look".....ours is the generation that's had the "New Deal"ours is the generation that's had the "New Frontier." And religion and theology have not escaped it -- we even talk about the New Theology.....always this itch, always this yen to look, to grasp for something that's new.

Well, don't misunderstand me, I readily recognize the necessity to use new terms. Maybe we've allowed ourselves to be handicapped by repeating old things so frequently that we've done it thoughtlessly. But I'm not about to go so far as those who'd rule out discarding even the name GOD, as though we could find something by which to supplant that word. And I ask you these Sundays now, in the next few weeks as I come to this sacred desk, to look back to an old day, and to an old set of laws, I fervently pray that by the guidance of the Holy Spirit I may bring a new accent to it. And if it please

God, some new interpretation. I recognize the necessity for this -- the new accent.

But you can see what I'm trying to say. Let's have done with this notion about going after something that's new just because it's new. And let's have done with this attempt to discard the old just because it's old. But let's lay down in front of us a basic ground-rule: that what we ought to look for, and what we ought to have laid hold upon us, is the thing that's true...and being true, it may be old, it could be newly discovered. Sunday by Sunday now, in these next few weeks when you come together and I meet you here, God willing, we're going to talk about the Ten Commandments. In the spirit of Jeremiah we're going to look back to the old way.

Now, on this day at this precise moment, let me tell you how it all came about. God created the world. God has always had a continuing concern with His created world. God has never allowed Himself to say, "I will wash my hands of this world forever." God knows how often, if we may use a figure of speech, we've tempted Him to think that way, but because He is God He's never gotten Himself around to the point where He will do it. So He goes on having a continuing interest in us.

Now at a critical point in history, of all the people on the face of the earth, He chooses one nation. Now that should not disturb you. When something needs to be done, a choice has to be made. We're always using instrumentalities, we're always using agents. So God, out of all the people on the face of the earth, chooses one group of people that they might become His instruments, that through them His way for all mankind might be known. He sees them coming out of bondage, He leads them into a promised land. Here

again, at a critical point in their history, He stops them, in their marching, and then through their leader He reveals to them....well, what do you want to call it?

....a set of laws?

....a code of ethics?

....a pattern for moral behavior?

....rules for their life in this world?

....well, whatever else you call it, don't over-rule the fact that it begins by saying:

"I am the Lord your God"

...which makes it more than a matter of morality. From the very beginning it has the religious aspect. What is religion but something that links you to God as it binds you with others? So the cardinal principle that's laid down at the very beginning is "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me." What is this, then, but what you have a God who is putting words on the lips of His people? They are His children. He is the Father. So He puts on their lips the words He wants them to speak.

Now that shouldn't bother you either. This is written largely in any family relationship. We who are grandparents -- how earnestly we wait until that child, that grandchild, speaks his first words, clearly and distinctlyand always words that he has heard somebody else first speak. That's why in moments of reflection, with a measure of gratification, we hear them say "Mommy"... "Daddy"....clearly, distinctly -- if for no other reason, then certainly this: from the very beginning the child is using a word that recog-

nizes his dependence upon someone other than himself, recognizing as time unfolds it, an authoritative figure over and above himself. The fact of life, so God dealing with His children, places upon our lips: "I am the Lord your God - - - no other gods" - - and then He laid down a precept that the children of Israel, His people, as long as they lived, no matter where they went, should keep using these words over and over and over again. The code of the Jews to this very day is according to the way it was laid down in Deuteronomic periods....."You talk about this when you sit down - - you talk about it when you get up in the morning - - you talk about it when you go to bed at night - - you talk about it as you travel along the road: there is one God. He is our God. There shall be no other gods.

This God who created us out of love endows us with the freedom of will. God intends that when we obey Him we obey Him because we intend to obey Him. We are not puppetlike creatures. But I say to you with all the ardor of my soul, the curse upon our day lies in the permissiveness that characterizes our generation. It all goes hand in hand with a people who seemingly forget that there is such a word as obedience. Yet can we not say that from the very beginning God out of love put upon the lips of His wandering children a series of 'Thou shalts' and 'Thou shalt Nots'. Yet in our day, perhaps more than any day in recent time, we're rejecting authority, rejecting time-honored, tested standards of behavior. Now the intention of this series of sermons is to call us back to what God's been shouting at us, in one generation after another.

I am being led to believe, in what little I have been able to read of history, that we are living through a period of time which is presumably the most determined as a large-scale effort in an attempt to get along without

God. The beginning of this century was marked by a tremendous self-confidence in which man was being exalted. He had, if you please, come of age -- highly scientific, increasingly literate, surely sophisticated, very ambitious, and very clever....absolutely appalling what the mind of man has been able to achieve! At last there were those who honestly believed that man had become the master of his fate, the captain of his soul. This was being declared as the final twilight of the gods. Listen to what Julian Huxley said, right back there in the early 20's: "A faint trace of God, half metaphysical, half magic, still broods over our world like the smile of a cosmic Cheshire cat -- " ...they how arrogantly he said it: "but the growth of psychological knowledge will rub even that from the universal freedom. No one is the Lord our God. We can stretch our wings at last."that's the way they talked in the 20's.

Where has it gotten us? May I say it? -- we remain a people who are running scared, frightened by what we could do, frightened by the consequences of what we have done. This is a real reading of life. I was tremendously surprised to hear it echoed by a young man who attended a retreat session of the college students on Friday night. How proud I'd be to claim him as a son. Realistically he echoed this sentiment: who can be optimistic about our age?and the curse upon us, because generally speaking we're not a people who ask for forgiveness, we're not a people who will ask about getting right with God. When Jesus Christ was here on earth He got into all kinds of trouble because He went to different places saying to people: "Your sins are forgiven." If there's one thing that wouldn't get Jesus Christ into trouble today, it would be that! For where are there people who are concerned about their sins?

And I'm willing to say to you that I think the reason is this: that

we've never quite seen ourselves as disobedient servants, we've never quite paid enough attention to God as the Law-giver. When I was a youngster and went across the street to the Methodist church I was somewhat impressed that every time they had a Communion service, the preacher led them in a recital of the Ten Commandments, with the understanding that as they read the Ten Commandments they saw themselves as disobedient servants. Maybe the note that has to be struck over and over again in our day is the twin words of the Christian faith -- LAW and GOSPEL.....LAW and GOSPEL....and the Gospel can have no meaning until we can see ourselves as people who have come under the curse of God's Law.

Well, Sunday by Sunday now I want to come back to this sacred desk. I'll be standing in the spirit of Jeremiah, asking you to look to the old way, with perhaps some new accent, terribly sensitive to the fact that when it's all said and done, maybe we don't break the Ten Commandments. In our failure to observe them, they break us.....and life has a way of proving it.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)